

The Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments

By George Jackson, B.A.

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TO

W. H. ROLLS : H. WATERWORTH

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MY COLLEAGUES, PAST AND PRESENT

IN THE WORK OF

THE METHODIST MISSION, EDINBURGH

PREFATORY NOTE

ALL that it is necessary to ask the reader to note by way of Preface is that the following chapters were delivered as a course of Sunday Evening Sermons to my own congregation during the months of last winter, and that, though they have since been entirely re-written, they still remain what they were originally, sermons, not essays.

G. J.

EDINBURGH, *October* 1897.

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INTRODUCTORY

'And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God,
which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of
bondage.'—EXOD. xx. 1, 2.

INTRODUCTORY

OF the unique position once held by the Ten Commandments among the most religious people in the world, one fact is a sufficient illustration: within the Holy Place was the Holy of Holies, wherein once a year the high priest entered alone to offer up sacrifices both for himself and the people; within the Holy of Holies was the sacred ark; and within the ark, shrined in the innermost sanctity of the Holy Place, were the two tables of stone whereon the divine finger had traced the eternal law. Could anything indicate more clearly the reverence paid to the Decalogue by the Jews, or declare with more solemn emphasis that the end of all religious observances is the keeping of the commandments of God?

But Christ having come (as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says), the minister of a new and better covenant, it was no longer possible that the commandments should be to the Christian all that they had once been to the pious Jew. Yet are we not to-day in danger of undervaluing the Ten Words, and of thinking that, because Christ has come, therefore they have lost for us all their deep significance? One can

only judge from the narrow round of his own observation ; but to me, at least, it does appear that there is not in our teaching and thinking to-day a sufficient recognition of those great first principles of morality which are here set forth. It was a remark of the late Mr. Matthew Arnold that among the many sermons to which, at one time or another, he had listened, he had never heard one on the Ten Commandments. I have a textual index to some two or three thousand sermons published by one of the greatest preachers of our day, but so far as I can discover, there is not one dealing with any of the precepts of the Decalogue. I do not forget that the great Anglican Church appoints the commandments to be read at every celebration of the Holy Communion ; but neither can I forget, on the other hand, that when a distinguished Presbyterian minister (Dr. Robertson of Irvine) proposed to adopt the same custom in his church some of the straiter sect immediately raised an outcry about 'dreadful innovations.' A visitor looking round one of our great cathedrals had his attention drawn by the verger to a wall which was somewhat bare and in need of decoration. 'You know,' said he, 'the Ten Commandments might be painted up ; and the Ten Commandments, sir, are better than nothing' ; and, unless I am mistaken, that naïve utterance of the cathedral verger was only a blunt expression of the indifference with which multitudes of even Christian people regard this ancient law.

I

But, it is sometimes said, is not the Decalogue a very crude and unfinished code of morals for men to-day? It served admirably for a semi-barbarous people, just escaped from a long and degrading captivity; but just because it did so serve, how is it possible that it should be adapted for us in these times? Moreover, what does it consist of but bare precepts, negative precepts too—the kind of peremptory unreasoning admonitions you might address to a child? But surely we have outgrown the need of these? Why trouble us with precepts now that we have principles which supersede them and make them needless? Did not Paul say that love is the fulfilment of the whole law? Did not Christ tell us that upon these two commandments, that we love the Lord our God with all our heart and our neighbour as ourselves, hang all the law and the prophets? If then we give heed to the eleventh commandment, why take thought for the rest?

Reasoning like this, which is very common, is much more plausible than conclusive, as one or two considerations will show :—

(1) It is said that we no longer need the detailed precepts of the law, now that Christ has given us the larger law of love which includes and supersedes them. And undoubtedly, if man were wholly ruled

and led by love, there would be little need to preach to him the simple moralities of the Decalogue, to say to him, 'Thou shalt not kill,' 'Thou shalt not steal,' and so on. But how much can we build on an 'if' like that? How many amongst us are there who are so ruled and led?

Moreover, do we not see illustrations every day how even love itself is in constant need of definite and detailed guidance? Because your children love you, you do not cease to command them; you do not argue—at least, if you are wise, you do not—'They love, that is enough; let them do what they will.' Men may love their fellows, and earnestly desire their country's good; nevertheless, society makes laws for them which it compels them to obey; it does not trust the general principle of brotherhood or patriotism to do all that is needful. And though in the Christian life it may be true that love is the fulfilment of the whole law, we still need the directing finger and the guiding voice to say, 'This is the way, walk ye in it.'

(2) But it is alleged that the morality of the Decalogue is crude and unfinished, a merely 'surface' morality. And of course the law of Moses—especially if in our interpretation of it we do not go beyond the letter of law—falls immeasurably short of the law of Christ. But a 'surface morality'? '*Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not commit adultery*—why, all these,' says some one,

'have I——' But stay, one moment before you finish the quotation ; the same law says—and this time I do not ask to go one step beyond the letter of what is written—*Thou shalt not covet*. Who wants to go on with the quotation now? Who is there of us who will stand up and say, 'I am clean even from this sin'? There, surely, is a morality that goes deeper than the surface.

But the most important fact has yet to be mentioned. Precisely what this ancient law meant to those who first received it I do not now stay to discuss. But—and this is the fact to be emphasized—we have a re-reading of it from the lips of Christ; and it is with this law, as Christ has interpreted it, that we have to do. Now hear Him: 'Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment. . . . Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.' Let a man shut himself up in the quiet of his own room, and listen while Christ reads over again this ancient law, and we shall hear no more from him about its 'surface morality'; the very last thing he will be likely to say of it is that it does not cut deep enough.

But however we may estimate the law given by Moses, it is still binding;¹ and however our relation to it may have been modified by the coming of Christ, this at least is clear, the keeping of the commandments of God is not less but more incumbent upon us because we are Christians. The verbs of the opening sentence of this chapter, 'God spake all these words, saying,' should both be read in the present tense, 'God speaks and says.' Some of us have an altogether inverted way of stating our relation to the Old Testament law. A Christian man rejoices that he is free from the hard, mechanical system that imposed the law of tithes, and then proceeds to demonstrate his freedom by a niggardliness of which any honest Jew would have been heartily ashamed. Surely that is the very acme of perverse misconstruction. If we are freed from one law, it is only because we have become subject to another and a higher. We quit the service of one master, not that we may be chartered libertines, but that we may enter the service of Another whose demands are even more exacting. More than is here God now asks from us; but He still asks all that is here. God still 'speaks and says'; His voice has lost none of its old imperative; and they only are well-pleasing unto Him who vow as did the children

¹ It will be understood that I am here speaking of the Decalogue as a whole. In what sense the Fourth Commandment is of perpetual obligation I have tried to explain further on.

of Israel: 'All that the Lord hath spoken will we do.'

II

Before we pass to the consideration of the commandments in detail, there are two or three further matters of a preliminary character that call for brief notice.

It is hardly necessary for me to remind you that many difficult and delicate problems touching the Decalogue have been raised by modern criticism of the Old Testament. At every step we are treading among the hot embers of many a still burning controversy. But inasmuch as my purpose in these addresses is wholly practical, and anything I have to say is in nowise affected by the final decision of scholarship on the points in dispute, whatever it may be, I shall pass over these matters of controversy in silence. In what sense we are to understand the material symbols said to have accompanied the giving of the law; what was the exact form in which it was first proclaimed by Moses; how far that original draft is identical with that familiar to us; and how it is related to other versions of the law which have come down to us (as, *e.g.*, that contained in the Deuteronomic code)—all these are matters which we may confidently leave to Biblical scholars to thresh out at their leisure in their studies; they do not concern us just now, and to attempt

to discuss them would be as impossible as it is undesirable.

One thing at least I think is clear: no criticism can diminish, though it may heighten, our sense of the greatness and majesty of that ancient moral law, which, like another Matterhorn, rises solitary and incomparable from the moral wastes that surround it. The two great ideas of the Decalogue around which, so to speak, all its precepts revolve, are these—God and duty. Beginning where all true thinking must begin, with the true idea of God and of man's relation to Him, it passes on to speak of man's relation to his fellow-man. And when we think of the marvellous enrichment which has come to the whole race through the new meaning with which these two great ideas were henceforth to be laden, it is not easy to restrain our impatience with those superfine critics who, using the light of the very law which they criticize, can see in the Decalogue only the rough incompleteness, the ragged edges, of an unfinished work. Can they—can any man—tell how much the whole world owes to-day for all in human life that is strongest and truest, all that is most gracious and tender, to that word which Moses gave to Israel amid the deserts of Sinai? To us, into whose lives its great and simple truths have entered, till they have become part of our very selves, it may speak nothing that is new, nothing that is remarkable, nothing indeed that does not appear perfectly self-

evident. But it was not always so. Take, *e.g.*, its great truth concerning God, that He is holy, just, and good, and that He demands a like goodness from them that worship Him. 'Of course,' we say, 'of course, God is good.' But why that 'of course'? Go back to the ancient world, and it was not so. As Principal Fairbairn tells us—and no man living speaks with greater authority on a subject like this than he does—the gods there were not good, often most utterly iniquitous and bad. 'In India, in the old hymns you could get written in honour of a god a drinking-song that any man in these days in an hour of hilarity might fitly sing. In beautiful, skilful, radiant Greece, what was Zeus, their great god?—an adulterer; what was Aphrodite?—personified lust. If you had said to a Greek, "You ought to be god-like," he would have said, "Nay, I will be man-like; that is more noble and honourable than to live after the manner of the gods." And if you had gone east into Phœnicia, where the neighbours of the Jews lived, what would you have found? You would have found gods, impurest of the impure, served not only by human sacrifice, but by blackest, vilest human lust. Religion was no moral thing there in any degree whatever, and where it had power without morality, its power worked in the most immoral way. Imagine, then, the transcendent moment for man, the moment of supremest promise, of grandest hope, when the idea of a moral deity entered his

heart and passed into his history, when all the energies of religion came to be moral energies for the making of moral men. That was a moment, I call it, of revelation—you may call it of supreme guess-work or grandest discovery; or you may, by magnifying incidental difficulties, attempt to conceal from yourself its meaning. Yet it were only to speak with prosaic soberness were we to say,—the moment when gravitation, navigation, the secret of the sea, of the sun, or the stars, or the earth, were discovered had neither singly nor all combined equal nor even approximate significance for man. Take from the heart of him this religion steeped in morality, made living by the moral character of its God, and you will leave him without the grandest energy working for good and peace and progress that ever came into his history or into his heart.'

That long quotation leads very naturally to the second point I wish to emphasize. By this law of the Ten Words—by the character of its precepts, and by the supreme place given to it, according to the divine command, in the nation's life and thought—God declared, in terms that could not be mistaken, that the end of all His dealings with men is righteousness. 'What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' Ceremony, symbol, rite—these have their place, as a hedge round about the law to protect and defend it, but never as its substitute. 'Righteousness

not ritual!' is the reiterated cry of all the great teachers and prophets of Israel; wickedness and worship God cannot away with. That grotesque mingling of moral and ceremonial offences which scholars tell us they find so often in the Egyptian ritual of the dead never meets us in the writings of the prophets nor here in the Decalogue. 'Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel,' cried the prophet Jeremiah, 'I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices: but this thing I commanded them, saying, Harken unto My voice and I will be your God, and ye shall be My people; and walk ye in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you'—that is the message which the prophets of Israel delivered as with one voice.

And, let me say, our study together of this divine law will accomplish but little if it does not serve to stamp that same great truth in sharper outline than ever upon all our hearts. And if any one is tempted to grow impatient, and to dismiss the truth as one of the simplest and baldest of all religious common-places, let him ponder these words of the late Dean Church: 'There is no strange self-deceit more deeply and obstinately fixed in men's hearts than this: that those whom God favours may take liberties that others may not; that religious men may venture more safely to transgress than others; that good men may allow

themselves to do wrong things. There is no more certain fact in the range of human experience than that with strong and earnest religious feeling there may be a feeble and imperfect hold on the moral law, often a very loose sense of justice, truth, purity.' In all the world's history there is no more mournful chapter than that long and, alas! still unfinished chapter on the divorce of morality from religion. In every age men have been ready, as some one said of the Jesuits, to lengthen the creed and shorten the commandments, to tithe mint and anise and cummin and neglect the weightier matters of the law. The Goths of ancient Spain, one historian tells us, were indeed very devout, 'but they regarded their acts of religion chiefly as reparation for their vices; they compounded for exceptionally bad sins by an added amount of repentance, and then they sinned again without compunction.' Twelve centuries later, George Borrow, travelling through the same land, declared of the wretched Jews of Lisbon, that, though they would not partake of the beast of the uncloven foot and the fish which has no scales, yet they broke the eternal commandments of their Maker without scruple. Newman had a like experience in the Morea, where he found ruffianly bandits, the terror of the whole land, who yet, with all their brutality, observed the fasts of the Greek Church with the utmost strictness. Benvenuto Cellini tells the story of his own life, in which the most pious sentiments and the grossest immorality

keep one another company on the same page, without apparently so much as a semblance of feeling of incongruity. Nelson sends home despatches so religious in their tone that even Wilberforce thought that they would have the effect of leading men to speak more of Providence, at the very time that he was living in an illicit union with another man's wife. And who has not heard of the infamous forger of our own day, who, fleeing from the hand of justice to Madrid, there to perish miserably by his own hand, was found with the scapular, the symbol of his religious faith, under his garments?

It is the old, sad story: 'Thou bearest the name of a Jew, and retest upon the law, and gloriest in God, and knowest His will, and approvest the things that are excellent, and art confident that thou art thyself a guide of the blind, a light of them that are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a——' yes, yes, but—we know how Paul pricked that puff-ball of vain pretensions—'thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou who gloriest in the law through thy transgression of the law, dishonourest thou God?' It is good to say, 'Lord, Lord,' to hear His word, to know and possess His law; but all this is nothing, and less than nothing, if it stand alone. 'The soul of religion is the practick part';

and it is 'he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven' who shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Once more let us read the familiar words before we pass to the precepts which follow: '*And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*' What is this? The Lord is our Law-giver, but first of all He is *Redeemer*. How we forget that! We remember the blackness and darkness and tempest, the mount that burned with fire and the thunder-smitten crags; but we forget this tender, gracious prelude. Like words of iron dropped from cold, stiff lips of stone the commandments seemed to us; but lo! by this one word they are softened and transfigured. Before God gave Israel the law, God set Israel free. No longer do His words seem to us as the arbitrary decree of a great and terrible Deity whose fittest symbol is the fiery thunder-cloud; they are the commands of Him who, with a stretched-out arm and a strong right hand, saved His people from the oppressor's yoke. Behind God's law is His love; Sinai is a foregleam of Calvary; the voice that cries, 'Thou shalt not,' is the voice of Him who can say, 'I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.'

Is not that ever God's way? His first approach to us is not in judgment, but in mercy. 'He that made

me whole, the same said unto me——,' that is the Divine order: first the blessing, afterwards the command. He lays His yoke upon us, but first of all He establisheth His love towards us. Shall we not hear and obey His Son, who is alike the revelation of the Father's love and the Father's law?

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

Thou shalt have none other gods before Me.'—EXODUS XX. 3.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

IT has already been pointed out that the two great ideas around which the various precepts of the Decalogue revolve are these, God and duty. The commandments of the first table establish the truth concerning God, and man's relation to Him; those of the second table, the duty of man to his fellow-man. We begin to-day the consideration of the former.

I

And I ask you to observe, at the outset, that the first word of a law whose end is righteousness, is GOD. That is the starting-point alike of religion and morality. The first essential of all true thinking and right living is a right thought of God. Who is God? what is His character? what are His claims upon us? by what name shall we name Him? To be wrong there is to be wrong radically; it is to have the stream poisoned at the fountain-head. 'I am the Lord thy God'—so begins the Decalogue. 'Master,' said one to Christ, 'which is the great commandment in the

law?' And Jesus said unto him, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment.' Therefore do Moses and Christ alike declare that to be right practically we must be right theologically, to be right manward we must be right Godward.

But nowadays men often say, 'Let us give heed to the Second Commandment; never mind the First. All that is written upon the second table of the law will we do; as for the rest, it matters not. God we do not know, and cannot be sure of; let us love and be kind one to another; what else can be required of us?' Some few years ago a great controversy was waged in the pages of the *Nineteenth Century* between Mr. Gladstone and Professor Huxley on certain matters touching Religion and Science. The controversy is now well-nigh forgotten, as indeed it deserves to be, and I only refer to it in order to quote one very striking passage from the pen of the Professor: 'In the eighth century B.C.,' he says, 'in the heart of a world of idolatrous polytheists, the Hebrew prophets put forth a conception of religion which appears to me to be as wonderful an inspiration of genius as the art of Phidias or the science of Aristotle: "And what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" If any so-called religion takes away from this great saying of Micah, I think

it wantonly mutilates, while, if it adds thereto, I think it obscures the perfect ideal of religion.'

Now, if Professor Huxley had accepted all that is involved in any fair interpretation of the great passage which he quotes, our controversy with him might have been at an end long ago. But, as a matter of fact, was it not he himself who 'mutilated' it? Nay, did he not tear out the very heart of it? For did he not assure us again and again that no man knows, or can know, whether or not there be a God who requires anything at our hand, with whom we may walk, humbly or otherwise? Huxley in reality cut down Micah's words to this, 'Do justly and love mercy.' But that, certainly, was not the prophet's ideal; we may doubt if alone it would long be the ideal of any people. What guarantee have we that man will continue to 'do justly and love mercy,' or even that he will continue to make these moral distinctions at all when once he has ceased to believe in a God of whose will they are the expression.

I cannot discuss the point further now; but if any young man is tempted to think that 'Christ's second commandment' is enough, that it matters little whether we hold any religious belief at all or not, and that, whatever happens, we may still remain in full and undisturbed possession of our great moral inheritance, let him turn to the first chapter of Mr. A. J. Balfour's *Foundations of Belief*, or to the second of Professor Pfeiderer's Gifford Lectures—no

'narrow-minded theologians' these, surely—and he will at least find enough to give him pause. But it is needless to go into the matter further, because though an individual here and there may have thrown off all belief in the existence of God, the overwhelming majority of mankind still continue theists of one kind or another. Man will not, cannot, sever his correspondence with the Unseen. His deity may be cruel as Moloch, lustful as Baal; but a deity of some sort he must have; the soul insists on an outlook heavenward, Godward. All history bears testimony to that. The very idolatry which this commandment forbids is the strongest proof of it. For a day men may succeed in persuading us that an iron Materialism has spoken the last word concerning the universe; but the reactor is certain to come—as we have seen it come in our day—and then, in one form or another, and sometimes in the wildest extravagances of superstitious folly, man's innate, indestructible faith in the supernatural reasserts itself.

Some thought of God, then, and of his relation to God—some 'theology,' that is—man will fashion for himself; some worship he will offer. And as are these things, so is a nation's life; by them is its character moulded. 'No nation,' says Principal Fairbairn, 'is ever better than its conception of God. Where God is badly conceived, the laws and manners of the people are sure to be bad; where He is nobly thought of, the ideal of the people will also

be noble, their history a struggle towards higher excellence.'

And this is the point at which God first meets His chosen people: not with a demonstration of His existence—for that there was no need—but with a revelation, albeit a partial revelation, of His character. First of all the Jew must be taught the true idea of God.

The revelation, I say, was 'partial,' and at this stage inevitably so. When can you tell the whole truth on any great matter to a child? You must be content to speak by hint, parable, suggestion. And as yet Israel was but a child, and must be treated so. Only in certain aspects of it could the truth concerning God be made known; not till the 'fulness of time' had come could the full revelation be given or received. Do I speak too strongly when I say that five-sixths of the so-called 'Old Testament difficulties' of which we have heard so much owe their existence to forgetfulness of that elementary truth? But though the whole truth could not yet be told, one lesson at least Israel must learn straightway, and this the First Commandment was given to make plain—Jehovah is supreme, solitary, sovereign: '*Thou shalt have none other gods before Me.*'

Did this command, it has often been asked, involve what is called an 'absolute monotheism'? 'I am the Lord, and there is none else; beside Me there is no God': so did Jehovah speak by the mouth of the

great prophet of the Exile. Was it thus that the children of Israel understood this first word spoken from Sinai? It does not seem to me necessary to insist on that interpretation. Monotheism is implicit rather than explicit in the commandment, which does not in so many words declare that there is but one God. As to the deities of Egypt, or Canaan, or other lands, nothing is said of them; they are simply passed over in silence; and at first, at any rate, Israel would not hear in the commandment any condemnation of them. But what this law did unmistakably mean was that for Israel there is but one God, Jehovah; whatever other nations might do, Him only must they serve. And when Israel had learned that lesson, the seed had begun to germinate from which was ultimately to spring the pure monotheism of Jew and Gentile alike.

II

The Lord is sovereign, supreme; this, I say, was the truth which, first of all, Israel must learn. And the truth was taught in two ways:—

(1) First, by the new name under which God made Himself known, the name of 'Jehovah.' What did this name signify? Without attempting to cut our way through the tangled thickets of controversy which have sprung up about the word, this at least seems clear: that it is derived from the old Hebrew

verb 'to be,' and that it has one of two possible meanings, either 'He who is' or 'He who causes to be.' What idea, then, do we get of Him who proclaims Himself by this name? That He alone *is*, uncreated and uncaused, alone He exists of Himself, the eternal source of all that is. I do not mean that this, and all that lay involved in it, was fully grasped by Israel at Sinai; but who does not see the significance of a name like this given to a people situated as the people of Israel then were? They had just escaped out of Egypt into Canaan. With the whole life of the inhabitants of both these lands polytheism was inextricably intertwined. In Egypt, whence they had but just come, men worshipped the sun, the moon and the stars, even the river and the soil. Now by one word the falsehood of it all is laid bare: '*I am Jehovah.*' These that men ignorantly worship are but created things; the Lord is their creator; He is God alone; Him only shall ye serve.

(2) But the revelation of Divine sovereignty was not limited by the new Divine name, great as that was. Long generations must pass before the whole truth, of which that name was the channel, could sink into the minds of the children of Israel. Meanwhile, something more definite and palpable was needed, something that would strike the imagination and make its appeal, vividly and immediately, to the whole people. And where should that needed something be found if not in their own past history?

Herein lies the significance of the reference in the words which stand as a preface to the Decalogue: 'I am the Lord thy God, *which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*' God did not seek to convince Israel by abstract reasonings that He was the supreme One; He manifested Himself before their eyes as supreme. He overwhelmed the false deities of Egypt with confusion; He brought to naught the might of Pharaoh and all his host; He made them to be a people who before were not a people; and then, when the evidences of His mighty working were manifest before them all, He gave them His law, saying, 'Thou shalt have none other gods before Me.' When Authority clothes itself in love like this, who shall say it nay? The slain Lamb in the midst of the throne who can withstand? There is no sovereignty like the sovereignty of grace. 'I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.'

Yet the truth was grasped but slowly. Israel's history is marked by the saddest and strangest lapses into idolatry. In spite of the warnings of the prophets, and the continual suffering which their waywardness brought upon them, the people turned again and again, with almost unaccountable perversity, to seek after strange gods. But He who brought them out of Egypt bore long with them, and taught them, till at last the truth first given

at Sinai became one of the priceless and inalienable possessions of the race: 'The Lord our God is one God; Him only shalt thou serve.'

III

But what does this First Commandment say to us to-day? Has it anything to say at all? We know that an idol is nothing in the world, that there is no God but one; and though there be that are called gods, yet to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things. What need, then, to proclaim in our ears to-day, 'Thou shalt have none other gods before Me'?

But are these things really so? We read that as Paul passed through the streets of Athens, 'his spirit was provoked within him as he beheld the city full of idols.' If he could pass through the streets of our cities to-day, would he find no idol-worship, think you, to stir his spirit within him? Most of us, perhaps, have never seen an idol in our life, unless it was in a museum or at a missionary meeting. Are there, therefore, no idolaters among us? Has St. John's exhortation, 'Little children, guard yourselves from idols,' lost all its point and meaning for us? When a great preacher took for his subject the other day, 'The Idolatry of Civilized Men,' was he the victim of a strange delusion? Do not let us deceive ourselves with words. Idolatry is an affair

of the heart. That which we lean on, that to which we give our best, that which enchains our heart—that is our god. 'A man's true worship is not the worship which he performs in the public temple, but that which he offers down in that little private chapel where nobody goes but himself.' And if there 'we have forgotten the name of our God, and spread forth our hands to a strange god, shall not God search this out? For He knoweth the secrets of the heart.' 'This people honoureth me with their lips': every week in God's house that is what we do. But if He who knoweth the secrets of the heart search us out, what shall He find? Will He say of us, 'Their heart is far from Me,' because we have chosen some other god before Him?

Idolatry dead? The First Commandment out of date? Alas, alas! no; never was the worship of the true God in such peril of being choked with the deceitfulness of idols as at this very moment in Christian England. We never broke the First Commandment? Then what of the Tenth? And covetousness is idolatry. Do we not still, as in the days of Habakkuk the prophet, 'sacrifice unto our net and burn incense unto our drag, because by them our portion is fat and our meat plenteous?' Is not Paul's terrible indictment still true of multitudes of us—we mind earthly things, our god is our belly? Would the Bedford tinker need to seek far to find his man that could look no way but downward, with

the muck-rake in his hand? One still stands over us with a celestial crown in his hand, and proffers to give us that crown for our muck-rake; but still we do neither look up nor regard, but rake to ourselves the straws, the small sticks, and dust of the floor. In all our thoughts God is not, but instead the greed of the Mammon-worshipper, the narrowing lust of gold, the unholy passion of the sensualist, all the petty vanities and sordid ambitions of them that every hour of the day and every day of the week crowd into the temple and grovel before the altar of the god of this world.

'Thou shalt have none other gods before Me'; and as surely as men forget that to-day, so surely shall the warnings of the prophets of old fulfil themselves in our ears. Every word they speak concerning the folly and futility of the idolatry of the past has an application, not less pointed, to the idolatry of the present. '*One shall cry unto [his god], yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble*': is it not so still? What can our gods do for us when we are brought low, or in the dark and sore abasement of death? '*In that day a man shall cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which they made for him to worship, to the moles and to the bats*': have we not seen that also, when men in weariness and disappointment have turned from their idols, it may be to seek after other gods to their hurt, it may be to seek after a true and living God to their salvation? '*They that make them shall be like unto them; yea, every one that*

trusteth in them': is it not always so? Our gods cannot lift us beyond ourselves; men follow their gaze; they grow like that they live for. '*Ahaz sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, saying, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me, but they were the ruin of him and all Israel*': God open our eyes in time, lest we also perish in like manner!

But mayhap we are attempting a compromise. Like the Jews, who never wholly cast off Jehovah, but thought they might give Him a divided allegiance; like the Roman Emperor, who had a statue of Jesus and a statue of Plato side by side in his pantheon, so we set up our little row of deities. To each we yield homage in its turn. To-day, the Sabbath, is saved for Jehovah; to-morrow, Mammon—or worse—is our choice. I tell you—no, not I, *He* tells you—nay! The Lord is a jealous God; He will brook no rival; He will share His throne with none; He will be all in all, or He will be nothing. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon. Him only shalt thou serve. Oh! let us take Him this day to be the Lord our God, let us yield ourselves to Him; and when again He speaks and says, 'Thou shalt have none other gods before Me,' let us make answer to Him, 'Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.'

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THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

‘Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor the likeness of any form that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation of them that hate Me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandment.’—
EXODUS xx. 4, 5, 6.

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

LET us begin by endeavouring to understand what the commandment means. Why was it given, and what exactly is it that by it is forbidden?

I

(1) And, in the first place, how is this Second Commandment related to, and how does it differ from, the First? To many the distinction is by no means obvious. More than once it has been said—Are not the two commandments really one? 'Thou shalt have none other gods before Me'—that forbids idolatry. 'Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor the likeness of any form that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them'—what is this but the prohibition of idolatry over again?

But this word 'idolatry' has two quite distinct meanings. Sometimes it signifies the worship of false gods; and when men bow down to the sun, the moon, or the stars, we call them 'idolaters.' That is the sin which

is forbidden by the First Commandment. But that is not the only meaning of the term. We speak of the 'idolatry' of the children of Israel, when in the wilderness they worshipped the golden calf which Aaron made for them. Yet they had not broken the First Commandment; the calf was not to them in the place of God; it was meant merely as the symbol of the unseen Jehovah. We are distinctly told that when the image was made, Aaron 'made a proclamation and said, To-morrow shall be a feast *to the Lord*.' Why then was God angry with the children of Israel, and why did He visit them with such sore punishment? Because they had worshipped the true God under a false and forbidden form: they had kept the First, but they had broken the Second Commandment. So likewise did Jeroboam sin when, after the revolt of the tribes and the division of the kingdom, he set up the two calves of gold—one at Bethel and one at Dan—as representatives of the God who was worshipped at Jerusalem. Ahab, on the other hand, 'as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam . . . went and served Baal and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal, in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria,' so setting at naught the First Commandment.

It is obvious that the two offences are closely allied, a breach of the Second Commandment readily preparing the way for disobedience to the First.

Nevertheless the distinction is clear: the First Commandment declares *whom* we shall worship, the Second, *how*; the First says Jehovah must be worshipped *exclusively*, the Second that He must be worshipped *spiritually*; the First stands for the *unity*, the Second for the *spirituality* of God. The Second Commandment is, indeed, an early form of the great truth afterwards published by Jesus Christ: 'God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him, must worship in spirit and truth.'

(2) Did the commandment make unlawful the cultivation of the arts of sculpture and painting? So it has been sometimes said, and the absence of works of art among the Jewish people has been pointed to in proof. It may be readily granted that the Jews were not an artistic race; in that respect they stand in striking contrast to the great nations by which they were surrounded. It may also be admitted that, whatever artistic instincts they may have possessed were in some degree checked by this commandment, as a similar interdiction in the Koran is said to have produced a similar effect among the Arab tribes.¹ On the other hand, even from the point of view of art itself, a plea may be put in on behalf of the iconoclast. Because of his loftier vision of God, 'he has, on the whole, more really furthered the progress of art than the artist whose work he has

¹ Kalisch, quoted in Dr. Whyte's *Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*.

destroyed.' Who, *e.g.*, would exchange the beauties of a prophecy like that of Isaiah xl. for all the beauty of all the idols of Babylon which it consigned to destruction?¹ And still further, let it be remembered that if the Hebrews contributed little to art, it was in the main because their whole strength was devoted to still higher and greater interests. In the Divine economy of nations, if Greece stands for art, and Rome for law, it is to Judæa that we look as the birthplace and home of religion.

At the same time, a fair interpretation of all the facts lends little support to the idea that this commandment was understood by the Jews as an absolute prohibition of the plastic arts. Such a law, it has been truly said, could not possibly have emanated from a legislator who ordered a holy tent, furnished with all adornments of art and beauty, and who even ordered two cherubim to be placed within the Holy of Holies. The first part of the commandment, 'Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image,' must be read in the light of the latter, 'Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them.' It was not the making of an image, but the making of it for purposes of worship, not the use of it, but the unlawful use, that the commandment forbade.

(3) One further question remains to be briefly answered. Why was such a commandment given

¹ See George Adam Smith's *Isaiah*, vol. ii., from which these two sentences are taken.

at all? The reason of the First Commandment needs no demonstration; the evils of polytheism are patent to all. But why were the Jews forbidden to make to themselves symbols of their Deity? Why should not a man be allowed some visible, material emblem, not that he may worship it, but that he may the better worship the unseen Jehovah, whose emblem it is? God Himself is great, distant, impalpable; why should I be denied the use of that which might bring Him near to me, and help me to draw near to Him? The reasoning sounds plausible; yet it was this very thing that Jehovah sternly forbade. Nor is it difficult to understand why.

All symbols tend to usurp the place of God Himself. Theoretically, it is true, men do not worship the material emblem. But all experience shows that as men put their trust in symbols, God is robbed of His due. The symbol is always on the way to being a fetish. Beginning by being only a medium through which the Eternal may be more easily apprehended, it ends by intercepting and securing for itself that which belongs to God alone. It was exactly this that had happened, as Principal Fairbairn tells us, in the land from which the children of Israel had just come. 'In Egypt,' he says, 'the symbolism had swallowed up all the spirituality of the religion. . . . The Deity was hidden by the symbols; the symbols were adored as Deity.' It was exactly this, too, which came to pass among the Israelites themselves,

when, in the days of Hezekiah, they burned incense to the brazen serpent, the symbol of a great Divine deliverance in the wilderness. Dr. Dale tells us that he learned to understand the growth of this kind of idolatry by observing the gradual clustering of superstitious sentiments around an engraving of our Lord which he had over his mantelpiece in his college days. It is the universal testimony: the visible symbol, which is at first nothing, is at last identified with God Himself.

And again, symbolism tends to degrade our conception of God. The calf-worship of which we read so much in the Old Testament was fatal, inevitably fatal, to the purity of the worship of Jehovah. In the mind of every worshipper a twofold tendency is at work—to lift the symbol to the place of God, to bring God down to the level of the symbol. What Paul saw at Athens happens always when men are given over to idolatry: they think that 'the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and device of man.' No idol, be it of priceless material worth, or only some rudely carved block of wood or stone, can be a true representation of God. To bow down before it is to cut the wings of the spirit; it is to fetter and cramp our thoughts of God, and to leave us earth-bound and material.

But though the children of Israel were thus forbidden to make unto them any graven image, the instinct that sought after a God nigh at hand and

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not afar off, a God who could be seen and heard and handled, remained in unweakened force. And at last the instinct was met and satisfied in the Incarnation. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us'; and a mortal man could write, 'That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life . . . declare we unto you.' He who dwelleth in the light unapproachable, whom no man hath seen nor can see, He who said, 'Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image,' sent forth His Son, 'the effulgence of His glory, and the impress of His substance,' that in Him all men may behold 'the image of the invisible God.'

II

The Second Commandment stands, I repeat, for the spirituality of worship. It is the denial of materialism in religion, of the need of man-made intermediaries in our approach to God. It bids us put our trust not in symbols, but in Him, and seek the quickening of our religious emotions, not through the cunning appeals of a sensuous ritualism, but by listening to the revelation of Himself which He has given us. Is there anything in our life to-day which makes necessary the repetition and emphasis of this

truth? There is. We are face to face at the present moment with a portentous revival of religious materialism which, under the name of 'Ritualism,' threatens to wither to its root this great doctrine of the spirituality of worship. In Scotland happily as yet we know little of this movement. But south of the Tweed a deliberate and determined attempt is being made, in the name of culture, art, and religion, to reintroduce that elaborate and cumbrous ceremonial system, which, three centuries ago, had well-nigh smothered the life of religion out of it, and from which we used fondly to hope the Reformation had freed us for ever. And meanwhile, in the great Anglican Church, the movement is carrying everything before it. It was no prejudiced Nonconformist, but Dean Farrar himself, who two or three years ago declared, in the pages of one of our leading reviews, that 'in twenty years, if things are suffered to go on at their present rate, the Church of England will have become Romish in everything but name.' Without making any attempt to state the whole case against Ritualism, let me briefly mention one or two general principles upon which we base our protest.

We are not Ritualists; neither are we Quakers; and though we may believe, as I do myself, that the ideal of the Quaker is immeasurably nearer the true ideal of worship than that of the High Churchman, yet we cannot go to the extreme of the former in his rejection of all rites and ordinances. So long

as human nature is what it is, with its dependence upon the material and the symbolic, and its need of visible forms to aid the dulness of its spiritual perceptions, so long will ritual continue to fill its place and discharge its function in religious worship. But—and here we join hands with the Quaker—that place is an entirely subordinate one. Ritual is a means to an end, not an end in itself; it is a ladder up the steps of which the soul may climb to God; it is as the bit of coloured glass which the astronomer uses to enable him to gaze upon the sun. But if the rite do not take us past itself, if the soul linger upon the steps of the ladder, if the eye do not get beyond the coloured glass, if the seen and temporal emblem do not lift our thoughts to the unseen and eternal reality, it has missed the whole purpose of its existence; it is not only not helping us, it is hindering and hurting us. And that, as all experience shows, is what always happens whenever ritual is exalted beyond its rightful place: religion is vulgarized and materialized. ‘Enlisting the senses as the allies of the spirit,’ says Dr. MacLaren, ‘is risky work. They are very apt to fight for their own hand when they once begin, and the history of all symbolical and ceremonial worship shows that the experiment is much more likely to end in sensualizing religion than in spiritualizing sense.’ Open your eyes and see if this is not precisely what is going on in our midst to-day. I have quoted before¹

¹ See the author's *First Things First*, p. 199.

some very remarkable statistics from a High Church hand-book published two or three years ago, in which the writer rejoices in the spread of High Church principles as evidenced by the fact that there are now in this country so many churches in which incense is used, so many in which the much-controverted eastward position is assumed, so many in which altar lights are burned during the sacrament of the Eucharist, and so on, and so on. Instead of the pure, spiritual religion of Jesus we get a religion of the senses, a baptized paganism after this fashion. 'Ye observe days, and months, and seasons, and years,' Paul wrote to the Galatians; '*I am afraid of you.*' And no wonder; for when ritual is the supreme care of the Church, the things most worth caring for are soon lost sight of. I am not a Covenanter nor the son of a Covenanter; but when your brave Covenanting forefathers, in the days of Scotland's bloody sweat and agony, spread the white cloth on the bleak mountain-side, and with only a deal table as their 'altar,' and a coarse earthenware vessel as their chalice, did 'eat this bread and drink this cup,' they knew more of the 'Real Presence' of Him who said, 'This do in remembrance of Me,' than is possible when, as so often to-day, the spiritual reality is hidden amid the blazing splendours, the visible pomp and circumstance, of a priestly ministration.

And further, this movement is a distinctly retro-

grade movement. In its inmost spirit it belongs to the dead past rather than to the living present. Let me explain what I mean. When we study the Old Testament dispensation, we are met at every turn by rite, symbol, and ordinance. These things were bound up with the very life of Judaism. But now, if we turn to the New Testament, what do we find? That of all the ritual observances to which so much importance had hitherto been attached, not one remains in force. The symbolism of faith is now represented only by what we term the two sacraments—Baptism and the Lord's Supper—concerning which it is only necessary here to say that late ecclesiastical usage has often attributed to them a significance of which it is impossible to find any trace, even the slightest, in the New Testament itself. To these two facts let a third be added. Says St. John, in his vision of the heavenly Jerusalem, 'I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.' Here then is the witness of revelation to the true place of ritual: first (and this is the lowest stage), we have Judaism, with its complex ritualistic machinery; then Christianity, discarding for the most part everything of the kind, though still ordaining certain simple rites; and last of all, the vision of the perfected future from which all trace of the figurative and symbolical has passed for ever away.

Then, if these things are so, where does the modern ritualist come in? Do you not see that the whole

movement is a gigantic anachronism? It is putting back the hands of the clock some three thousand years. The very fact that God once used ritualism on the large scale and then deliberately put it by, is the strongest of all reasons why we should not now go back to it. 'Ye that have come to know God,' Paul wrote to the Galatians—and verily it is a thing to be marvelled at that thinking men with that great Epistle in their hands should be led astray by the shallow plausibilities of a pretty ceremonialism—'how turn ye back again to the weak and beggarly rudiments, whereunto ye desire to be in bondage over again?' And a 'turning back' the movement certainly is. It is the man that was healed going back to the crutches with which he used to hobble along in the days of his lameness; it is the grown-up man, who has learned to read, going back to the A B C picture-book of his childhood; it is for us who have with open face beheld *Him* to choose rather to dwell among the types and emblems that do but dimly shadow Him forth.

Is it said that multitudes find in these things helps to a higher life? Be it so; yet even then the word of warning is not unneeded. But when men say, as they do say, that these things are necessary, and that without them it is impossible to please God, we dare not be silent. Do you remember how, we are told, the Greeks came to Jesus? They came first to Philip of Bethsaida and asked him, saying, 'Sir, we would

see Jesus.' Philip cometh and telleth Andrew ; then Andrew cometh and Philip, and they tell Jesus. And there are some who would fain persuade us that it is only in that same circumambient fashion that a man can find his way to Christ. You must come by the 'Church,' or the priest, or the sacrament. A thousand times *No!* I am no violent anti-Romanist, God knows, but I am a Protestant, and I for one do protest against the idea that any rite, or priest, or church has right or authority to stand between my soul and my Saviour. That hateful heresy, the fruitful mother of a thousand mischiefs, is rearing its head amongst us again to-day, and if we do not take heed to ourselves, if not we, then our children, will have to fight the battle of the Reformation over again. Thank God it is as easy to come to Christ as it was in the days when Nicodemus came by night and when the woman of Samaria talked with Him by the well-side. The way of approach is as direct, as immediate as ever it was: 'Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out'; 'him . . . to Me'—and the middleman, let him call himself by whatever name he will, is an intruder. And what can he do for us? We have our great High Priest, and all that draw near to God through Him, He is able to save *to the uttermost*. Now, though you have ten thousand earthly intermediaries, how much can they add to God's great 'uttermost'? Therefore let us ourselves come, and bid all men come, and come boldly, unto the

throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need.

III

And now, in conclusion, let us glance for a moment at the stern words with which obedience to this commandment is enforced: 'For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation of them that hate Me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments.' The words have been often misunderstood, and sometimes by certain sceptics of the baser sort grossly caricatured. Men have read in them the blind vengeance of a vindictive Deity, the unreasoning fury of one who, when he has been wronged, strikes out wildly, not knowing or caring on whom his blows may fall. Why, they have asked, should the children be made to suffer for the iniquity of their fathers?

Do not let us lose sight of the fact that if there is here what looks like a terrible threat, there is likewise a promise. And the promise is greater than the threat, for if the iniquity of the fathers is to be visited upon the children *unto the third and fourth generation*, mercy is to be shown *unto a thousand generations*.¹

¹ This is, without doubt, the true rendering. See R.V. marg., and cp. Deut. vii. 9: 'The faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him, and keep His commandments, to a thousand generations.'

And when we come to examine this twofold statement of God's dealings with man, what is it but a simple and unscientific statement of the truths which nowadays we sum up under the convenient term of heredity? The race is one. For good or for ill, the life of the one is bound up in the life of the many. And instead of murmuring, should we not rather be thankful that these things are so? What other guarantee have we for the progress of mankind? If the gains accumulated in one generation could not be passed on to the next, if the fathers could transmit nothing to the children, every generation would need to begin anew, the race would be at a standstill. And because this is not the law of our life, therefore are we where we are to-day; others have laboured, and we have entered into their labours.

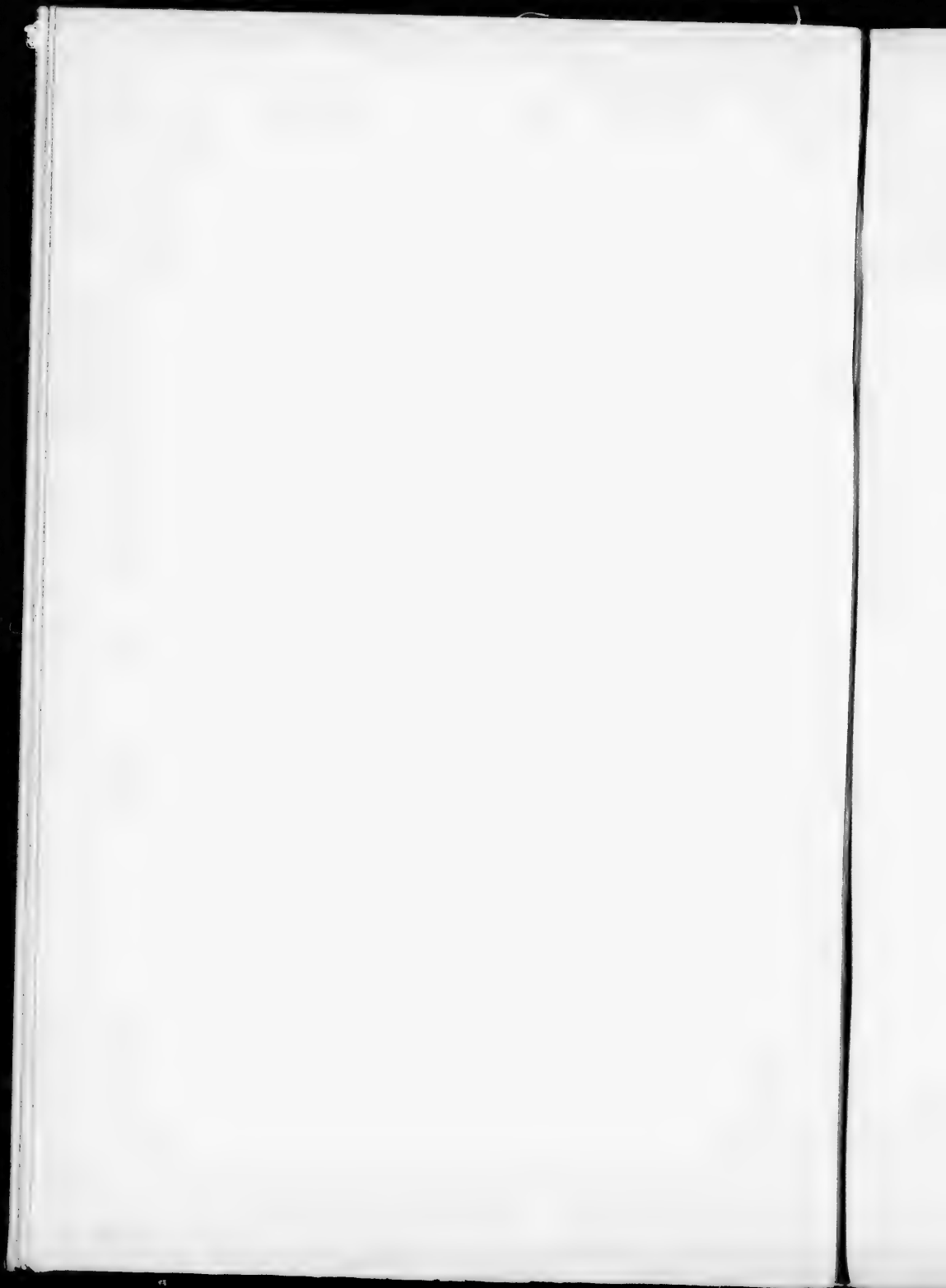
But, of necessity, the truth is two-sided. The law works with stern impartiality. We cannot choose the good, and leave the bad, perpetuating the one and annihilating the other. Every man must enter upon the whole of his inheritance, the bad as well as the good. It may seem hard that the iniquity of the fathers should be visited upon the children, yet when we remember that this is so by virtue of a principle which alone secures the growing welfare of the race, all idea of injustice vanishes. The law which underlies this great sanction of the Second Commandment, rightly understood, is the merciful provision of a good and wise God, who, through all man's sin and folly, is

ever seeking to lead him to higher and higher levels of goodness and truth.

And why should we stumble at that word, 'I the Lord thy God am a *jealous* God'? The word has suffered serious degradation at the hands of us in whom jealousy is so often a mean and unworthy temper. Nevertheless there is a holy jealousy, a jealousy which is the pain of wounded, thwarted love, the hunger of love for that which is its due, its own. And such is the jealousy of God. Why did He command His people, saying, 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image'? Because He would have all their love for Himself. And when they thrust creed, or rite, or symbol between Himself and them, He sent His prophets to lay rude hands on the unholy thing, and to cry, 'Nehushtan! a piece of brass! In the Lord God of hosts be your trust, and not in these things!'

Once when I was a lad a jeering unbeliever said to me, 'Your Bible is not true to itself: it says that God is love, and it says that He is a jealous God—how can He be both?' and I, being only a child, did not know how to answer him. But now I know that God could not be a jealous God if He were not a loving God; His jealousy is a measure of His love. Never could He speak thus to me if He were indifferent to me, if it were a matter of no concern to Him whether I served Him or not. And when I read these old, old words, instead of the face of an

angry Deity, breathing forth threatenings and wrath, which is all that some men see, there meets me a Face all aglow with love, and eyes that hunger for my love. And when I put down my ear to listen, instead of the gnashing fury of jealous hate, which is all that some men hear, a Voice of love, tender, beseeching, pitiful, calls to me: 'Child of man, I have redeemed thee, thou art Mine; yield thyself to Me.'



THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

‘Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain ; for the
Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.’—
EXODUS xx. 7.

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

FOLLOWING the plan of the two previous addresses, let us begin by learning in what sense this commandment was understood by those to whom it was first given, passing then to the consideration of its meaning for us to-day.

I

There is some slight ambiguity in the wording of the commandment. What is it to take the name of the Lord 'in vain'? The phrase so translated—I follow the exposition of Principal Dykes—may mean either of two things: (1) *Falsely*, that is, to cover a lie; or (2) *Without reality*, that is, as an empty, hollow pretence. So that the commandment may be regarded as a prohibition of false swearing; or, giving to it a more general meaning, as directed against all idle and irreverent use of the Divine name whatever. In a word, the commandment condemns either perjury or profanity. If now we turn to the book of Leviticus, we shall find there (xix. 12) a kind of amplified version of this law, in which both sins

are condemned: 'Ye shall not swear by My name falsely; neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am Jehovah.' We shall therefore probably be right if, interpreting the earlier word in the light of the later, we regard this commandment as the prohibition of perjury and profanity alike.

It is worthy of note that, so emphatic is the testimony which this ancient code bears to the cardinal virtue of truthfulness, the sin of false swearing is condemned both by the Ninth and Third Commandments. There it is forbidden as a crime against man, here as a sin against the Most High God, whose majesty it violates, whose judgment it defies.

Considerable discussion has arisen concerning the relation of this commandment to the taking of judicial oaths. It will hardly be contended that the custom of oath-taking in courts of justice is a breach of the commandment as it stands in the Decalogue. To say nothing of the solemn example of Jehovah Himself swearing by His own awful Name, the sense of this law was undoubtedly given by Jesus when He said, 'Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths.' It is, of course, the words of Christ which follow which have given rise to the doubt that has arisen in the minds of some: 'I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by the heaven, for it is the throne of God; nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet; nor by

Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, for thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your speech be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: and whatsoever is more than these is of the evil one.' The Friends, as is well known, regard these words as an absolute prohibition of all oaths under any circumstances whatever. Let me say at once that, whether their interpretation be right or wrong, it is nothing less than monstrous that any one holding it, and therefore conscientiously questioning the lawfulness of oaths, should be subjected to legal or civil disabilities for refusing to take them. Ideally, too, in this as in other matters, I believe the Quaker is right. His is the goal towards which Christ is pointing us; and when human society is reconstructed on the basis of the Sermon on the Mount, and a man's word is his bond, the oath will be a meaningless form, because it will be impossible to add to the sacredness of the obligations of truth. But that time is not yet; and meanwhile, because of the hardness of men's hearts, many things are suffered to remain which will one day pass away. Further, Christ's words must be interpreted in the light of the circumstances under which they were spoken and of the rest of Scripture. When Christ spoke truthfulness was being undermined by the false distinctions permitted and encouraged by the casuistry of the Rabbis. There were, they said, oaths that were binding and oaths that were not binding. If a man sware by

Jehovah, or used the Divine Name at all, his oath bound him ; but if the Sacred Name did not pass his lips, if he only swore by Jerusalem, or by the Temple, or by his head, he might go free. Christ broke through this mesh of rabbinical sophistry with one plain word, and, regardless for the moment of all possible exceptions, declared, 'I say unto you, Swear not at all.' That there are exceptions, the New Testament itself seems plainly to show. Witness the solemn asseverations of St. Paul : 'Before God I lie not,' 'I call God for a witness upon my soul,' 'God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son.' 'And our Lord also,' as one writer points out, 'when put on oath before the high priest, took the adjuration as made under the law, and thus both recognized and established the lawfulness and propriety of the judicial custom.'

Of the sins which this commandment forbids, perjury and profanity, it is not necessary for me to speak ; the one is a crime against the common law punishable by severe penalties ; the other is now an offence so vulgar that to be guilty of it is to be guilty of a breach of the laws of all good society. It is indeed a fact of sad significance that, as Dr. Dale says, profanity should have held its own as long as it was regarded only as a sin against God, and vanished as soon as it became an offence against the conventionalities of the drawing-room. The commandment is more than a prohibition, it is a call

to reverence, and it is as such that I want us here carefully to consider it. 'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain'; that is to say, not the 'name' simply, but all that the name connotes and reveals; the character and being of Him who took it, that thereby He might make Himself known, are to be held in reverence. The Jews, with that strange literalism which has always been their curse, gave their reverence to the word itself. The mere vocable was invested with mysterious awe. It was never used in their intercourse with heathen nations; gradually they ceased even to use it themselves. There is a tradition that it was heard but once a year, when it was uttered by the high priest on the great day of Atonement. 'In reading the Scriptures it became customary never to pronounce it, but to replace it, wherever it occurred, with another Divine name, which was regarded as less awful and august.' And, as every one who has had a first lesson in the reading of his Hebrew Bible knows, the signs of that strange custom are to be found there to this day.¹ This is the beginning of that Pharisaism which by and by will devour widows' houses and for a pretence make long prayers. Not with such observances can God be well-pleased. None the less His word abides, not one jot or tittle of this law has passed away, and His call to reverence is as loud and clear as ever. Let us give earnest heed unto it to-day.

¹ See Dr. Dale's Lecture on the Third Commandment.

II

There has been of late years a marked decay of the spirit of reverence. Religious authority, rank, grey hairs, the parental relation—none of these command the reverence once yielded ungrudgingly to them. Nor is the tendency by any means confined to our own country. In modern France, Mr. Hamerton tells us, the sentiment of reverence is less and less cultivated. 'The difficulty is,' he says, 'to find objects for reverence that can effectually withstand the desecrating light of modern criticism.' The average Frenchman finds them neither in religion nor in politics; and though in family life there is much affection and some respect, there is no veneration. It is to be hoped that we have not suffered to the same extent in this country; but that we have suffered seriously, no one, I think, will deny. But it may be urged that much of the so-called reverence of the past was false and degrading. The obsequious deference of the poor to rank and wealth has given place to the manlier independence of an age that believes

'The rank is but the guinea stamp,
The man's the gowd for a' that.'

The superstitious veneration that clung about some of the great names and hoary institutions of the past has vanished at the first touch of the light of truth. It

was inevitable that it should be so, and instead of lamenting the change we ought rather to rejoice in it. This is true, yet our danger is very real; the danger, that is, that in uprooting the tares we uproot the wheat also, and so the true and the false perish together. Do any of us adequately realize the peril there is to everything high and worthy in life through the loss of the spirit of reverence? To coarse, positive, loud-tongued irreverence nothing great or good is possible; and I do not know if there is anything quite so utterly damning and damnable—I use the strong words advisedly—as the cynical, *nil admirari* spirit which has fallen like a withering blight on the minds of so many of the clever young men of to-day.

Yet there could be no greater mistake than to suppose that reverence fades when knowledge grows. Mr. Hamerton speaks, in the passage I have already quoted, of 'the desecrating light of modern criticism'; and undoubtedly criticism is often rude and irreverent enough; indeed Mr. Hamerton goes so far as to say that the critical writing which is most keenly enjoyed to-day is absolutely destitute of veneration. Nevertheless, the truly great are never scoffers; they refuse to sit in the seat of the scornful. 'Mockery is the fume of little hearts.' 'There is no chance of truth at the goal,' says Coleridge, 'where there is not a child-like humility at the starting-point.' Truth must be sought, as another eminent truth-seeker of our own day has told us, not clutching her by the hair of the

head and dragging her after us in a kind of boisterous triumph, but devoutly, tentatively, and with the air of one touching the hem of a sacred garment ; not as a prisoner of war, but as a goddess. All our wisest and best teachers emphasize this for us. 'We live by admiration, hope, and love,' says Wordsworth. 'The first condition of human goodness,' says George Eliot, 'is something to love ; the second something to reverence.' 'All real joy and power of progress in humanity,' says Ruskin, 'depend on finding something to reverence, and all the baseness and misery of humanity begin in disdain.' And therefore does Tennyson pray—

'Let knowledge grow from more to more,
But more of reverence in us dwell.'

III

Especially do we need to cherish the spirit of reverence in religion. And certainly no man can be a believing student of the Bible and yet count this one of the 'second-rate sentiments of the soul.' Summarize the first three commandments, and is not this what they say to us : 'Think of God worthily, worship Him worthily, let His name be counted holy'? When Jehovah appeared to Moses in the midst of the burning bush in the wilderness, His first word to him was a call to reverence : 'Draw not nigh hither : put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the

place whereon thou standest is holy ground.' When Isaiah beheld the vision of the Lord, it was as one sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, whose train filled the Temple : ' Above Him stood the seraphim : each one had six wings ; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts : the whole earth is full of His glory.' '*God is in heaven and thou upon earth,*' says the writer of Ecclesiastes in one pregnant sentence, '*therefore let thy words be few.*' And though in the New Testament God comes down out of heaven, the law of reverence loses none of its stringency. ' When ye pray,' said our Lord to His disciples, ' say, Our Father, which art in heaven ' ; but the first petition checks all irreverent presumption, ' Hallowed be Thy Name.' Do we not read of Christ Himself that He was ' heard for His godly fear ' ? So does all Scripture, alike by precept and example, exhort us to have grace ' whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God, with reverence and awe ; for our God is a consuming fire.'

Yet will any one deny that there are multitudes of Christian men and women who never think seriously about this matter at all ? Take, *e.g.*, our treatment of the words of Holy Writ. When we remember what the Bible is ; how that, enshrined within it, like a precious jewel in its casket, is the very word of God Himself ; when we call to mind all that it has been

to countless generations of the sainted dead, and all that it is still to multitudes of earth's holiest and best, is it worthy of us, to take no higher ground, to turn its sacred words to ridicule, or to use them to point our sorry jests? I remember once hearing a distinguished preacher and Doctor of Divinity, speaking from this very desk, perpetrate a miserable joke, which I try in vain to forget, about the parable of the Prodigal Son. It was sacrilege; a man who could jest over the fifteenth of St. Luke 'might have chalked a caricature on the wall of the Holy of Holies, or scrawled a witticism on the sepulchre in Joseph's garden.' When the Church trifles with her holy things after that fashion, is it any wonder that the world is quick to follow her unhallowed example?

Again, have not we Nonconformists still much to learn in the matter of the conduct of public worship? I am not usually disposed to apologize for Archbishop Laud—and indeed, in these days, when he has so many apologists, it is hardly necessary—but when Laud found the Communion Table, which then stood in the middle of the nave of the church, used for all kinds of purposes, as a desk for irreverent churchwardens, and sometimes even as a hat-stand, he did well to be angry. And, not to put too fine a point upon it, are we not often guilty of a certain irreverent slovenliness in the worship of God's house? I have no patience with the peddling exegesis of the ritualist who thinks that the meaning of Paul's mistranslated words about

bowing 'at the name of Jesus' is fulfilled by the worshipper bobbing his head or making a curtsy at the mention of the Sacred Name; nor do I believe that the apostolic injunction to do everything decently and in order is the one great commandment upon which hang all the law and the prophets. Nevertheless, we have forgotten the honour due to God's great name. We have belittled the idea of worship; our churches and chapels are to us often no more than 'preaching-places'; our people ask, 'Who is going to preach?' and what is perhaps worst of all, the offering of the congregation's prayer and praise and the reading of the Word of God—the whole service, that is, except the sermon—are spoken of and treated as mere 'preliminaries.' These things, let us frankly admit it, are a reproach to us. We must strive for the exaltation of the idea of worship; and if the ritualist or anybody else has shown us a neglected duty, let us be unfeignedly thankful, and make haste to mend our ways.

Is there not some danger, too, to the Church just now from a false sensationalism? I am no apologist for dulness; and some of the churches amongst us which, as Sydney Smith used to say, are 'dying of dignity,' would be none the worse, but very much the better, for a touch of the extravagances they are so quick to condemn in others. For there is a true as well as a false sensationalism; and perhaps the most sensational preaching the world has ever listened to

was heard in Galilee more than eighteen hundred years ago. Nevertheless, there is danger. It is not for us to sit in judgment on men who have bravely set themselves to break up the stony indifference of our big cities, whose methods may not be our methods, yet because they are owned by God are above our criticism; but when one reads the catch-titles of some modern sermons, and the advertisements of some present-day services—advertisements which savour more of the music-hall than of the House of God—he cannot but feel that St. Paul's 'all things to all men' is already strained to the breaking-point, and that it is possible to sacrifice too much, even with the laudable motive of winning the careless and the indifferent.

And, again, is there not also danger—to take but one more example—in a certain type of evangelical Christianity which, glorying as is its right in the nearness and grace of Christ, sometimes forgets what is due to His greatness and majesty? God forbid that I should rob one heart of the joy and strength that come to it through the knowledge of that free access which in Christ all men have to God. Yet do we not often miss in the hymns and prayers of to-day that strain of awe and wondering adoration that ought ever to mingle with our words when we speak of Christ? Let us beware of overmuch familiarity; do not let us fondle Christ. '*My Lord and my God!*' faith cries in the rapture of her new-found joy; but let her not forget that He is '*my Lord and my God.*'

'God is in heaven, and thou upon earth ; therefore let thy words be few.'

Let no one say these things are 'trifles.' Rather let us remember, as some one has said, that 'reverence is the comely sheath within which all the vital New Testament virtues are nurtured.' Habits of irreverence end inevitably in the coarsening of the soul's fibre, and religion itself cannot long live where reverence has died out.

IV

How then shall we cherish and foster the reverential spirit? The answer must be in one word. 'Whatever things are honest'—or, as the word literally means, 'reverend,' to be venerated—'think on these things.' Every day the soul is creating its own atmosphere, its own environment, which in turn reacts upon itself; therefore if we would have the reverent spirit we must fix our mind upon things worthy to be had in reverence.

But now, let us take heed how we apply that. Let us foster, say some among us, the spirit of religious awe by subdued cadence and mystic colour and Gothic arch; let us appeal to men through all the subtlety and charm of an ornate and beautiful ritual. But whatever value there may be in these things for some, there is peril in the use of them; and if we Nonconformists have with some persistency refused

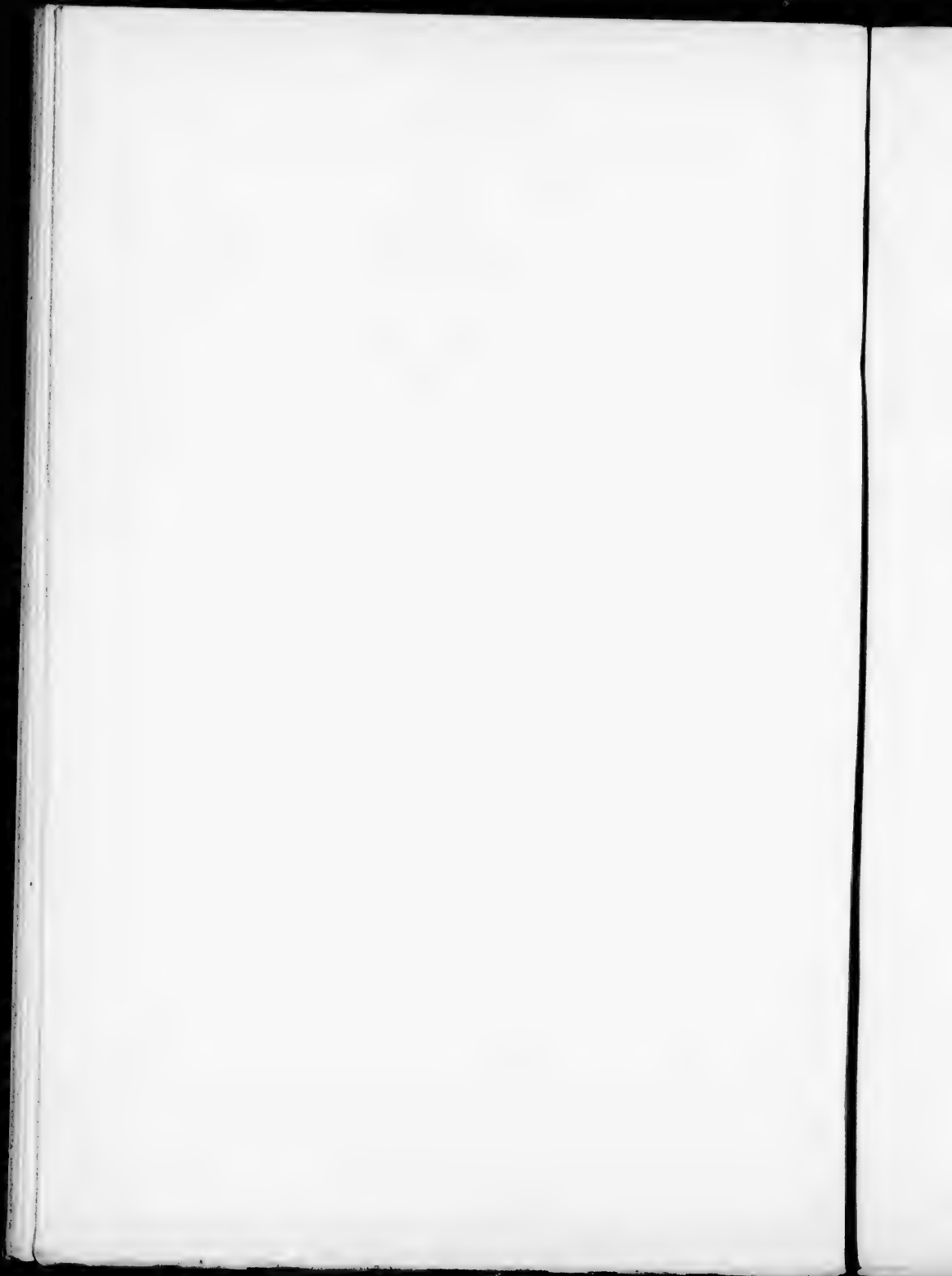
their doubtful aid, it has not been without good reason. Our emotions may be kindled or subdued by the sweet harmonies of colour and sound ; we may be rapt into solemn ecstasy by the beauty of wailing litany or rolling symphony, and yet in all this there may be no true reverence. Reverence is the soul's awestruck sense of the presence of God. When Moses beheld the burning bush in the wilderness, the sight only awakened within him the spirit of curiosity : ' I will turn aside now, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burned ' ; but when God called unto him out of the midst of the bush and said, ' I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,' then ' Moses hid his face ; for he was afraid to look upon God.' And it was when Isaiah knew that his eyes had seen the King, the Lord of hosts, that his soul was bowed down within him, and he cried, ' Woe is me ! for I am undone.'

Brethren, let us beware of a counterfeit reverence. I would rather, if I may adopt the words of another,¹ be a follower of George Fox, and sit with my hat on in a meeting-house little better than a village club-room, than educate my soul into an awe that is not born of the thought—

' Lo, God is here ! let us adore,
And own how dreadful is this place !
Let all within us feel His power,
And silent bow before His face.'

¹ See a very striking sermon by Rev. T. G. Selby in his *Lesson of a Dilemma*, p. 143.

Therefore if we would keep this Third Commandment, if we would cherish at all times the spirit of reverence, not only must we 'think on the things that are reverend,' but, as one of the old mystics loved continually to say, we must 'realize the presence of God.'



THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

‘Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work : but the seventh day is a sabbath unto the Lord thy God : in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates : for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day : wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.’—EXODUS xx. 8-11.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT¹

THERE is, perhaps, none of the commandments concerning which it is so difficult to speak plainly and to some practical purpose as the Fourth. I hold entirely with those who say that the pulpit is not for the airing of man's doubts, but for the proclamation of God's certainties. Yet this is just one of those cases in which, though a man is almost compelled to speak, it is so difficult for him to speak with certainty.

The relation in which Christians stand to-day to the Sabbath instituted by the Mosaic law has been construed in terms directly opposite by men of equal scholarship and godliness. Thus the great Continental Reformers, Lutheran and Calvinist alike, held that 'Scripture hath abolished the Sabbath by teaching that all Mosaic ceremonies may be omitted since the Gospel has been revealed.' The Scotch Reformers, on the other hand, declared that God 'in His Word, by a positive moral and perpetual commandment, binding all men in all ages, hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath, to be kept

¹ I have to express my indebtedness throughout this chapter to Dr. Dale's lecture on the same subject.

holy unto Him': and they even go so far as to affirm that this day 'from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ was the last day of the week, and from the resurrection of Christ was changed into the first day of the week.'¹

If from doctrine we turn to practice the divergencies are even more bewildering. Of our custom in Scotland it is needless for me to speak; but if you go on to the Continent you find a very different practice prevailing. And when I speak of the Continent, I am not thinking merely of the gay, butterfly life of the average Parisian. In Germany, *e.g.*, it is said that the Sabbath is kept by the very strictest and most spiritual of the people as a day for public worship and general relaxation; and when the worship is over the pastor will join with his people in playing their national games. No one, I suppose, will question the devoutness and sincerity of the late Prince Consort; yet it was a well-known fact that the Prince used frequently to spend Sunday evening in playing a game of chess with his friends; and when some one whom this fact greatly shocked wrote to Bishop Wilberforce on the matter, the Bishop replied by reminding his correspondent of the facts which I have just mentioned, and of the difference between the Prince's training as a German Lutheran and ours in this country.²

¹ See Chadwick's *Exodus (Expositor's Bible)*, p. 305.

² See Bishop Wilberforce's *Life*, vol. i. p. 377.

And for some of us the case is still further complicated by the fact that while in practice we hold with those of the straiter sect, we are yet often compelled to part company with them as soon as they begin to give reasons for the faith that is in them. Good causes are often weakened by the hopelessly bad logic of some of their advocates ; and that is the fate which has befallen the Sabbath question. The conclusions of the Sabbatarian are often irreproachable, but his premises are usually impossible ; he gives his case away the moment he opens his mouth in argument. Most people know the advice once given by Lord Mansfield to a man of practical good sense who, being appointed governor to a colony, had to preside in its court of justice without previous judicial practice or legal education. 'Give your decision boldly,' said Lord Mansfield, 'for it will probably be right ; but never venture on assigning reasons, for they will almost infallibly be wrong.' When I listen to the arguments of some of my Sabbatarian friends I am often tempted to wish that it was possible for them to follow the same advice.

The moral of all this is surely very plain : in a matter in which good men think so differently, we must avoid all censorious and uncharitable judgments. Of all unlovely sins, the sin of uncharitableness is the unloveliest, and withal, the most gratuitous. Can any be more displeasing to God than they who mingle their own strict observance of the

Sabbath with the most liberal denunciations of all who interpret the Divine law in a different fashion? Ah, brethren! it will avail us little at the last that we have kept the Fourth Commandment with never so much diligence if all our life has been a transgression of the Eleventh Commandment, which is the fulfilling of the whole law. 'One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let each man be fully assured in his own mind. Who art thou that judgest the servant of another? to his own lord he standeth or falleth.' That is the true spirit in which to approach the subject, and it is only so that it can be profitably, or even safely, discussed.

I

When we turn to the New Testament for our instruction, we are perhaps somewhat taken aback to find that its first word on the subject appears to be a simple negative, and to this effect, that *the Jewish Sabbath is no longer binding on Christians*. Yet it seems impossible to read the writings of St. Paul and avoid that conclusion.

In the Old Testament we find special reverence given to the Sabbath along the whole line of Israel's history. But when we pass to the New Testament we are conscious at once of a startling change. Even among Jewish Christians we see the observance of

the seventh day receding further and further into the distance, and another day—the first of the week—is selected for very special but very different regard. But what, perhaps, surprises us most of all is the absence of any trace of such a law as was imposed upon the Jews at Sinai being laid upon the Gentile converts, in regard either to the seventh or any other day of the week. On the contrary, there is an unmistakable annulling of the ancient Sabbath; when it is not ignored, it is deliberately set on one side. Thus, *e.g.*, at the famous ‘Council of Jerusalem,’ when the apostles and elders had come together to consider the relation of the Gentile Christians to the law of Moses, which some desired to bind upon them in its entirety, this was the decision unanimously arrived at and transmitted to the brethren of the Gentile churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: ‘It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication; from which if ye keep yourselves, it shall be well with you.’ Yet in this all-important judgment, in which the Holy Ghost Himself is claimed as an assessor, and the sole purpose of which was to state the points in which the Gentile Christians were requested to have regard to the scruples of their Jewish brethren, there is, as we see, not one word of reference to the ancient Sabbath. That is what I mean by

ignoring the Sabbath. Elsewhere, as I have said, it is distinctly annulled. Take, *e.g.*, the words from Paul's Epistle to the Romans, which I have already quoted: 'One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let each man be fully assured in his own mind.' 'I am afraid of you,' the Apostle wrote to the Galatians. Why? '*Ye observe days*' [Sabbaths, that is], 'and months, and seasons, and years.' Or, if this be not sufficient, read this from the Epistle to the Colossians: 'Let no man judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a feast day, or a new moon, *or a sabbath day*: which are a shadow of the things to come.' Conjuring with texts has sometimes produced very astonishing doctrinal results; but it is difficult to see how the cleverest jugglery can explain away the significance of statements like these; and if we accept St. Paul as an authoritative interpreter of the Gospel of Christ, these words ought to be to us the end of all controversy.

Moreover, the idea of one day in seven set apart as holy unto the Lord is essentially a Jewish rather than a Christian idea. The same idea, in other forms, meets us frequently in Judaism. Thus we have the holy nation, the holy tribe, the holy man, the holy place, and so forth. And the meaning was that God claims all our life. 'Consecrated men, consecrated property, consecrated space, consecrated time, declared that God still claimed the world as His own,

and that in all the provinces of human life He insisted on being recognized as Lord of all.' Just as a landowner, over whose property the public are allowed to make a way, will sometimes close it during one day in the year that thereby he may show that the land is his every day, so God decreed that one day should be set apart for Him, that men might learn that to Him not one but all our days belong.¹ When Christ came the larger truth was plainly taught; therefore that which was designed to lead the way towards it, which was in its very nature only provisional and temporary, itself passed away. The Sabbath was, as Paul said, 'a shadow of the things to come,' and when that which was perfect had come, that which was in part was done away.

It is sometimes sought to parry the force of these conclusions by urging that the Sabbath was instituted, not at Sinai, but at the Creation, and that therefore its obligation is unaffected by the passing away of the Mosaic law. In reply to this, there are two things to be said. In the first place, traces of the existence of a weekly Sabbath before the Exodus are so extremely uncertain that they can scarcely be said to exist at all. Of none of the patriarchs do we read that they remembered the Sabbath day to keep it holy. And though of course we hear of 'weeks' long before the giving of the law at Sinai, the

¹ The illustration is borrowed, I think, from one of Robertson's Sermons.

division of time into periods of seven days is one thing, the observance of one of them as a sacred day or day of rest is another and altogether different thing, and of this there is no certain trace till after the Exodus. And even though there were—and this is the second fact to be named—it is difficult to see how it could affect the question under discussion. For if Christianity superseded Judaism, much more did it supersede all that went before Judaism.

And besides all this, setting aside for the moment all consideration of what he ought to do, as a plain matter of fact no Christian does observe the Fourth Commandment. The commandment bade the Jews keep holy the seventh day of the week ; we keep holy the first. The commandment said, 'In it thou shalt not do any work,' and when it said that it meant it ; we read in one place of a man who was stoned for gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. But not so do any of us observe the Lord's Day, neither do we fear that such non-observance will be visited with penalties so dread. And still further, the day to which we pay special regard is to us commemorative of events wholly different from those of which the weekly Sabbath reminded the pious Jew. How then, in face of all this, is it possible for us to declare that the Sabbath of the Jews is still binding upon us to-day ?

II

Then has the Fourth Commandment no longer any meaning for us? What is the relation of the Sabbath that has passed to the weekly Day of Rest that still remains, and how is the observance of this latter day to be maintained and defended? I am sorry to have spent so long in what will appear to be merely negative and destructive criticism; but it was necessary to clear the ground in order to answer these questions, and to build up the truth as it is in the New Testament. Certainly, the commandment has a meaning for us to-day; and there is a very manifest relation between the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Sunday, though the latter is not fenced about by the restrictions which protected the former.

Very interesting is it to note how the observance of the Lord's Day sprang into existence. It was not a creation, but a growth, and in the New Testament we can watch it growing. It was not the outcome of a definite command, as the Sabbath before it had been, but a response to the conscious needs of the early Christian Church. At first, and for a little while, the believers would observe the Sabbath, as had been their wont; when exactly the practice ceased we cannot tell; probably it died out gradually as did, *e.g.*, their attendance at the services of the Temple. In the case of the Gentile Christians, as

we have already seen, the law of the Sabbath was never imposed at all. Meanwhile, another influence was at work among Jews and Gentiles alike. There might be no imperative without bidding them to keep holy the seventh day, but there was an imperative within that called them to worship, to prayer, and to fellowship. They had, moreover, from Judaism ready to their hand the conception of a weekly day of rest ; what then more natural than that, fixing on the day which was to them the day of days, the first day of the week, the day on which our Lord rose from the dead, they should pay to it something of the special regard that, under Judaism, had been paid to the seventh, and separating themselves from their ordinary duties, should give themselves wholly to prayer and the Word ?

Now, obviously, there is nothing in all this to constitute a command definite with the definiteness of the Fourth Commandment. Yet we need have no shadow of misgiving that in following in the footsteps of the first disciples we are acting in perfect harmony with the will of God. People who are never satisfied unless they can quote chapter and verse for all they believe and do will doubtless sigh for the sharp decisiveness of the language of the Decalogue. But such a spirit is the sign of a little faith. Is not God the Holy Spirit still in His Church to guide it into all truth ? Is there one who knows what the observance of the Lord's Day has been to

us, and who will ask himself where we should have been without it, who can yet doubt for one moment that it is of God? Has it come to this, that we can only hear God's voice in the stern 'Thou shalt not' of Mount Sinai, and not when He speaks to us through the long years of the Church's history? When any institution of the Church can claim the manifest blessing of the Most High, anxiety about title-deeds is want of faith in God.

Moreover, has God not given us, once for all, a clear revelation of His will in this matter in the Fourth Commandment itself? To say, as I have said, that the Jewish Sabbath has passed away is not to place the command to keep it holy on the same level as, say, the command to abstain from shell-fish, or to practise the rite of circumcision. Else how comes it that this commandment has a place among the permanent moral laws of the Decalogue? The Sabbath was 'a shadow of the things to come.' True, but beneath its passing form there lay an eternal truth, and that permanent element of good passing over into the Christian Sunday has been by it secured to all mankind.

III

Now will become manifest the grounds on which we plead for the observance of the weekly Day of Rest. It is a great social institution which provides

for man his needed physical rest ; and it is a great spiritual privilege which secures to him, what he needs not less, the opportunity for religious worship and spiritual culture. It is of perpetual obligation, because it ministers to deep necessities which are themselves perpetual.

Of the value of the Christian Sunday as a social institution it is hardly necessary, at this time of day, to speak. On that point the verdict of history has been given, and men of all sects and parties are agreed. In a letter written a few years ago, 'at the end of a laborious public career,' Mr. Gladstone stated that to his constant observance of the Christian Day of Rest he attributed in great part the prolongation of his life and the preservation of the faculties he still possessed. John Bright once said in the House of Commons that 'the stability and character of our country, and the advancement of our race, depend very largely on the mode in which the Day of Rest, which seems to have been specially adapted to the needs of mankind, shall be used and observed.' And Lord Macaulay—to make one more quotation—speaking in the same place, said : 'We are not poorer, but richer, because we have, through many ages, rested from our labour one day in seven. That day is not lost. While industry is suspended, while the plough lies in the furrow, while the Exchange is silent, while no smoke ascends from the factory, a process is going on quite as important to the wealth

of nations as any process which is performed on more busy days. Man, the machine of machines, the machine compared with which all the contrivances of the Watts and Arkwrights are worthless, is repairing and winding up, so that he returns to his labours on the Monday with clearer intellect, with livelier spirits, with renewed corporal vigour. Never will I believe that what makes a population stronger, and healthier, and wiser, and better, will ultimately make it poorer.'

It would be easy enough to multiply testimonies of this sort ; but our peril to-day lies not so much in the encroaching of the hours of labour as in the inroads of the pleasure-seeker eager for the multiplication of the forms of public amusement. I observe that a distinguished clergyman in the West End of London recently told his congregation that if, after joining in worship, they chose to refresh themselves by playing 'any game that is lawful on any day,' so long as it did not involve the employment of others, they were guilty neither of a social nor of a religious offence. Perhaps not ; yet it does appear to me that, as things are with us just now, such a bit of advice might well have been omitted. Already the mania for sport has grown to be like a fever in our blood, and if the hours of Sunday are only to be so much added fuel to the flame, some of us will be tempted to wish that they might be denied to us for a time till we have come to a calmer and a wiser

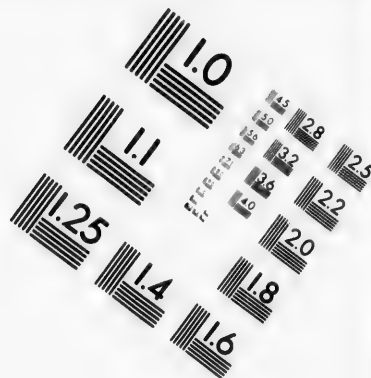
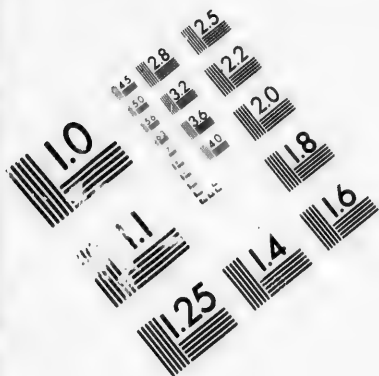
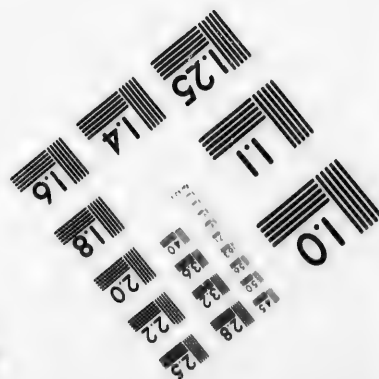
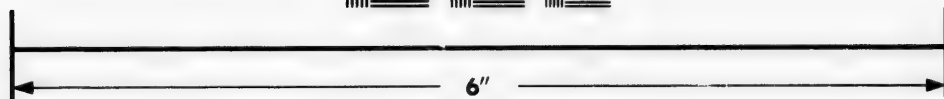
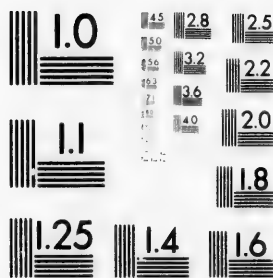
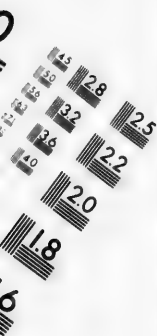


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mood. Some persons are never weary of sneering at what they call 'the insufferable dulness of the Scotch Sabbath'; and when you are as ignorant as many of these self-appointed censors of our Northern ways are, nothing is so easy as to sneer. But if the choice has to be made between Puritan over-precision, on the one hand, and that laxity 'which, in many parts of the Continent, has marked the day from other days only by a more riotous worldliness, and a more entire abandonment of the whole community to amusement,'¹ on the other, then I for one shall hold up both hands for the Scotch Sabbath. As I have said before, 'a wide and rapid extension of the provision for public amusement will inevitably mean in the long-run more work for those who have already too much work to do,'² and let working men and women remember—for the question touches no one so nearly as it touches them—that not only in the book of Moses, but in the book of human nature, is it written, 'Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work.'

And if man needs one day in seven for physical rest, not less does he need it for spiritual restoration and soul-culture. Mankind's great want just now, as Hawthorne says somewhere, is sleep. 'The world should recline its vast head on the first convenient

¹ F. W. Robertson.

² See a brief discussion of the Sabbath question in the Author's *Table Talk of Jesus*.

pillow, and take an age-long nap. It has gone distracted through a morbid activity.' O the sick hurry of our modern life, that leaves us no leisure to grow wise! That bitter French epitaph, 'Born a man and died a grocer,' says all there is to say about the lives of multitudes.

'The world is too much with us ; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.'

Therefore, just because the world is so much with us, just because we are 'by thronging duties pressed,' the more resolute must we be to push the world back from us, and to shut and bolt the door against it. Ah, brethren, I tell you, these crowded, bustling days would soon trample out of our lives all that makes us kin to God if we had not the silent spaces of our Sabbaths wherein the soul may think and pray and grow!

And when once we have lifted this Sabbath question to that level, we shall cease to vex either our own souls or the souls of our ministers with the little nibbling interrogations of a petty casuistry: is it wrong to ride in a tram-car, or to read a novel, or to visit friends, or to do on the Sabbath day any of the many things concerning which some people love to be for ever asking questions? For my own part, I decline to discuss these matters or to make rules for anybody but myself. I have read of a good Bishop of the time of James I. who, when he was asked whether ladies might on Sundays employ their hands

in knotting (something like what we call 'netting'), he replied with purposeful ambiguity, 'They may (*k*)not.' The wise old man was right. Let us rise to the true conception of the Lord's Day, and questions like these will never be asked, or will answer themselves. We are not under law, but under grace. The Sabbath is not so much an obligation as a privilege; it is not a tax which God levies, it is a free gift which He bestows. So let us think of it, so let us receive it, and our Sabbaths will become to us also 'a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable.'

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THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

**'Honour thy father and thy mother : that thy days may be long upon
the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.'—EXODUS XX. 12.**

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

THE position of this commandment in the Decalogue arrests our attention at once. It has often been pointed out that the Ten Commandments are a kind of summary of our duty to God and to man. But now it would appear that they were originally divided, not as we are accustomed to see them, but into two tables of five commandments each; so that the Fifth Commandment was regarded as belonging, not to the second table, which sets forth our duty to man, but rather to the first, which sets forth our duty to God. The fact is not without significance, and may serve to emphasize for us the sacredness and importance of this commandment. In the years of childhood parents are to their children in the place of God; they are His vicegerents, clothed with His authority; the family is His institution. Disobedience to parents, therefore, is not simply a sin against man; it is even more a sin against God, by whose will their authority is exercised. Even the ancients seem to have had some glimpse of that truth when they called filial love by the beautiful name of 'piety.'

A further fact which invests this commandment with special dignity is referred to by St. Paul: 'Honour thy father and mother,' he says, '*which is the first commandment with promise.*' The promise is this: 'That thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.' But what does the promise mean? Is it simply a promise of long life to the individual? So it is often understood; and, instances to the contrary notwithstanding, I see no insuperable difficulty in the way of adopting such an interpretation. It will hardly be questioned that, speaking generally, a life disciplined by habits of order and obedience will not so soon wear itself out as a life which knows no restraint, and in which outbursts of reckless lawlessness are wholly unchecked. And yet I am not at all sure that this is what the promise means. Remember that in that early time anything like an organized national life can scarcely be said to have existed. Everything centred in the family; it was the keystone of the arch; whatever struck at its authority imperilled the very existence of the whole slender social fabric. When, therefore, God said, 'Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee,' what He meant to declare was that submission to parental authority was not merely the guarantee of individual long life, but the surest safeguard of national stability and well-

being. Certainly the whole question is well worthy of consideration from that point of view to-day; and if this suggested interpretation be the true one, it adds immensely to our sense of the importance of this commandment.

I

And now if, with thoughts like these, we turn to the Scriptures—Old and New Testaments alike—we shall find this impression of the sacredness of filial duty deepening with every re-reading. Almost the first curse pronounced in the Bible is spoken against Ham, who revealed the shame of his father Noah; and the echoes of that curse reverberate throughout the whole Book. ‘Cursed be he,’ says the Book of Deuteronomy, ‘that setteth light by his father or his mother!’ ‘The eye that mocketh at his father,’ thunders Agur, the son of Jakeh, ‘and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.’ On the one hand we have Joseph, the type, not only of youthful chastity, but of filial piety: ‘Ye shall tell my father,’ he said to his brethren, ‘of all my glory in Egypt and all that ye have seen’—as though his own cup of happiness could never be filled to the brim until his old father Jacob had tasted it with him; and, on the other hand, Absalom stands the mournful chief of those who bring down

their fathers' grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. In all literature, sacred or profane, are there any words that so go to our hearts as the piercing cry of David over his twice-dead son: 'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!' And to this day, it is said, each Jewish child, as he passes by the traditional tomb of Absalom in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, 'is taught to spit at it and hurl a contumelious stone at the resting-place of the rebellious son.' And let every young 'Rechabite' to-day remember that the first Rechabites won their blessing from God because they hearkened to the commandments of their father Jonadab.

Not less impressive is the witness of the New Testament. To children Paul writes—and this is the only word which he addresses directly to them—'Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right'; and one count in that terrible indictment which he brings in the first chapter of his letter to the Romans against the Gentiles is that they were 'disobedient to parents, without natural affection.'

Again, when the rich young ruler came to Jesus saying, 'Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?' Christ answered by quoting some of the commandments, and among them this: 'Honour thy father and mother.' Never did the fires of His indignation burn with a fiercer heat than when He denounced the heartless quibbling of the

Rabbis, who suffered a man under cover of a religious imposture to escape his obligations as a son. Such an one had only to say of all or any of his worldly possessions, 'It is Corban' (*i.e.* given to God), and though the vow remained unfulfilled until the day of his death, a destitute parent had no claim upon him. 'Ye hypocrites,' said Jesus, 'well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.' And, as if this were not enough, behind the words of Mary's Son, like a great sounding-board to fling them forth to the world, are the thirty years He spent in Nazareth subject unto His parents. Have we young men and women who call ourselves Christians pondered as we ought the fact that, apart from the incident in the Temple, the only thing we know of Jesus during thirty out of the thirty-three years of His earthly life is that He kept the Fifth Commandment?

II

There is, I think, a special call to emphasize this commandment to-day, in view of a combination of circumstances tending to elbow the old-fashioned virtue of honour to parents into the background.

In certain quarters a deliberate attempt is being made to break up the institution of the family as it exists amongst us at present. Some Socialist writers—among them, I regret to say, the late Mr.

William Morris—do not hesitate to tell us that while 'it is reasonable to feel tenderness for the persons who have taken the pains of cherishing us in our helplessness, and to wish to pay them back with some little kindness when we no longer need that care,' it is unjust and absurd that we should continue to bear the obligations that hitherto religion and custom have united to lay upon us. That is a question which just now I must decline to discuss. All I will say is this, that if Socialism ally itself with doctrines of that sort, good-bye once and for ever, in our land at least, to all its dreams of a reconstructed society! There are postulates in the world of morals as there are in the world of mathematics, things that we do not discuss, but take for granted, and the sacredness of Home is one of them.

But, apart from deliberate attacks such as this, not a few of the social conditions of life to-day are full of peril to the home, and especially to that spirit of reverence to parents which this commandment enjoins. Mr. Barrie puts his finger on one of these in his beautiful book, *Margaret Ogilvy*, when, speaking of the changes that have come to pass in his own native Thrums, he says, 'With so many of the family, young mothers among them, working in the factories, home-life is not so beautiful as it was. So much of what is great in Scotland has sprung from the closeness of the family ties;

it is there, I sometimes fear, my country is being struck.' The readiness, too, with which boys and girls scarcely in their 'teens, nowadays become wage-earners often creates a kind of false independence which is a very bad atmosphere for filial respect to flourish in. And then our boarding-school system, with all its advantages, has this grave disadvantage, that it takes children away, during their most impressionable years, from the direct personal influence of their parents, and renders, I will not say impossible, but in many cases extremely difficult, the full exercise of love's rightful authority. And when to all this we add that spirit of lawlessness, of revolt against authority in all its forms, so characteristic of the present day, and a solvent more powerful than any of the facts which I have named, it is easy to see how these changed conditions of life, if they be not carefully watched, may in the end undermine those habits of submission and obedience which, in their right place, are so essential to the building up of a true, strong, and noble character.

These, then, are some of the circumstances which seem to make needful to-day a re-emphasis of this ancient law. I shall be told, perhaps, that the commandment has its application to fathers and mothers as well as to children. That is true, and St. Paul having written, 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord,' turns straightway to their parents, 'And,

ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.' But it is not to these that I wish specially to speak just now, nor yet to very young children, but rather to young men and women still in their 'teens, or only just out of them; and they, I trust, will grant me the apostolic liberty of using great plainness of speech.

III

What is meant by 'honouring' father and mother? No exact definition need be attempted; but in all worthy 'honouring' of our parents, these three elements must be included: Obedience, reverence, love. In that painful account which John Stuart Mill gives us, in his Autobiography, of his early education by his father, he frankly confesses that, though he was loyally devoted to his father, he did not love him. This is probably one of the cases in which the fault has to be laid at the father's door rather than the son's; but however that may be, such a relation between parent and child is but a very imperfect realization of the relation set forth in this commandment. Obedience, reverence, love—these three, and each of them is necessary.

(1) First, *obedience*—and if this were a children's address this is the word on which I should lay the emphasis. But as these words are not meant for them, let me say, parenthetically, to their fathers

and mothers, that for a little child religion is summed up in the word obedience; to him the Fifth Commandment is the First Commandment and the sum of all the Ten Commandments. You are to your children in God's stead, and your word to them must be as God's law. Many of us are anxious that our little ones should learn to say their morning and evening prayer, to love God's Book, and to delight in the services of God's house. And all this is right and fitting; but again let me remind you, that when Paul writes to children he says nothing of these things, but only, 'Obey your parents in the Lord: for it is right'; and that all that we know of the boy Jesus is that He went down to Nazareth with His parents and was subject unto them. For a little child, to obey is better than to pray, and we do our children a grievous hurt when we allow any display of religious precocity or priggishness to even seem to atone for a lack of prompt and willing obedience. If they give not reverence unto the fathers of their flesh, how shall they learn subjection unto the Father of spirits and live?

But when children have grown to manhood and womanhood, obviously the duty of obedience is modified. If children are to be commanded, young men and women are rather to be consulted; for, after all, as some one has said, fathers are not captains in a regiment, neither are their sons privates in a company. It is probably just here, in actual

life, that practical difficulties most frequently arise—in the case of grown-up sons and daughters still living under the parental roof. I fear I can contribute nothing to their solution. Where children are grown up, let their parents remember that they are no longer children; and let the grown-up children not forget that their parents are their parents still. And though that may sound a bit of oracular wisdom, as cheap and as useless as such wisdom usually is, it is all I can say; after all, where the ties of reverence and love are strong, there will be few difficulties that will not easily be solved.

(2) But whatever difficulties may beset the duty of obedience, respect and reverence are always due. Yet it is in this that many, even of those who love, are found wanting. It is said of the children of Jonathan Edwards, that when their parents came into the room they all instinctively rose to their feet and remained standing till their parents were seated. That is a method of showing respect to parents which is now, I suppose, altogether antiquated. But, for one, I confess I like that old-world courtesy better than some of our modern ways. When a youth who has had a University training, for which his parents have had to scrape and pinch and deny themselves, all which they have willingly done, that they might give their son a better start in life than they had themselves—when such a youth speaks half contemptuously about 'the Mater' or 'the Guv'nor,'

when he affects to be ashamed of the old folks, because, forsooth, their grammar is at fault, or because they have not learned all his company manners, that Old Testament text is not a whit too strong for my feelings: 'Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother!'

None of us had a humbler woman for his mother than was Margaret Carlyle, and the cleverest of us is not likely to stand higher than did her son Thomas. But do you know that when Mr. Froude went over Carlyle's papers, he found amongst them one endorsed with a trembling hand, 'My last letter to my mother'? Let me read you a few sentences from it: 'My dear, good mother,' he began, 'let it ever be a comfort to you, however weak you are, that you did your part honourably and well while in strength, and were a noble mother to me and to us all. I am now myself grown old, and have had various things to do and suffer for so many years; but there is nothing I ever had to be so much thankful for as the mother I had. That is a truth which I know well, and perhaps this day again it may be some comfort to you. Yes, surely, for if there has been good in the things I have uttered in the world's hearing, it was *your* voice essentially that was speaking through me; essentially what you and my brave father meant and taught me to mean, this was the purport of all I spoke and wrote. And if in the few years that may remain to me I am to get any more

written for the world, the essence of it, so far as it is worthy and good, will still be yours. May God reward you, my dearest mother, for all you have done for me! I never can.' It is said that when James Garfield was installed as President of the United States, he insisted that his aged mother should be present at the ceremony; when it was complete, in the presence of them all, he turned and kissed her withered cheek. If any man is tempted to set lightly by his father or his mother because his name has been set on high, let him remember James Garfield and Thomas Carlyle.

(3) Obedience, reverence—*love*. Of many things that might be said concerning love to parents I have only time for one, and I select it because experience has taught me so often its need: Cultivate a free and spontaneous expression of your love. In that beautiful book of Mr. Barrie's, from which I have already quoted, he tells us that, reticent as the Scot may be outside his own home—in fact, 'a house with all the shutters closed and the door locked'—once at home he is self-revealing in the superlative degree, and the feelings so long dammed up overflow; he has not more to give than his neighbours, but it is bestowed upon a few instead of being distributed among many; he is reputed niggardly, but for family affection at least he pays in gold. Perhaps that is true of more homes than we think. Nevertheless, it is an undoubted fact that in England and Scotland alike

we are too much ashamed of the signs of emotion, till often, for lack of demonstrativeness, the feelings themselves are starved. I have never once—if I may speak for myself—reproached myself that I have spoken too freely ; but a hundred times I have done so because the gratitude, the love, the regret that were at the heart did not find the right word in which to utter themselves ; and the opportunity passed and the word was never spoken.

There is a pretty story told concerning the late Dr. Dale. He was travelling, I think, in the Colonies. Speaking on one occasion of the relation of a pastor to his congregation, and pleading for a freer reciprocity of feeling between them, he said that he often felt inclined to say to his own people, 'If you love me, tell me so.' The little speech reached England sooner than did the speaker, and when some months later the doctor entered the hall in Birmingham in which a 'welcome home' had been arranged for him, almost the first object that met his eyes was a large scroll across one end of the building, 'We love you, and we tell you so.' 'If you love me, tell me so'—it is what multitudes are asking. Do not say it is a mean or vulgar desire ; it is the cry of parched souls that are thirsting for love and sympathy. And perhaps there are none who utter that cry so often in the silence as our fathers and mothers. Let us love them, and let us learn to tell them so.

IV

But what, it may be asked, 'f our parents are unworthy? How can a child 'honour' a drunken and dissolute father or mother? A very painful story of child life is told in the recently published Autobiography of Philip Gilbert Hamerton, the distinguished art critic and man of letters. Hamerton's mother died shortly after his birth; his father gave way to the wildest excesses, and treated his little son with great cruelty; he died in a fit of apoplexy, brought on by an outburst of ungovernable passion because his boy failed to read an article in the *Times* to his satisfaction. Under circumstances like these, how can the Fifth Commandment be obeyed? Here, again, I can only answer in the most general terms. Never let us forget that golden saying of Savonarola to Romola: *Man cannot choose his duties*. Our parents may be unworthy, but they are our parents still; our obligation to them may be modified by circumstances, but it remains—it is an obligation still. And, at least, should so great a calamity have overtaken us, and should parents of ours, like Noah, have fallen into some gross and terrible sin, let us choose, not with Ham who revealed, but rather with Shem and Japheth who reverently hid their father's shame. Now, if ever, surely ours should be the love that not only 'beareth' but 'covereth' all things. (See 1 Cor. xiii. 7, margin, R.V.)

It may be well to remind ourselves that, in the nature of things, the Fifth is the only one of the commandments which we cannot always keep. So long as we live, we may not kill, we may not steal, we may not commit adultery; but from some of us already, and from all of us soon, death has taken, or will take, our parents, leaving us only their memory to honour. Let us take heed that we are not laying up for ourselves regrets, bitter as they will be all unavailing, against the days to come. Every one has heard of Dr. Johnson standing bareheaded in the rain in the market-place at Uttoxeter, to do penance for an act of disobedience towards his father fifty years before; and they tell how one of our Scottish kings, James IV., because once in his boyhood he had stood in arms against his father, used in after life to wear an iron belt under his robes, and every year to that belt he added another link, that the remembrance of his sin might be the heavier upon him. Ah, young men and young women! I tell you there are no memories that can sting and burn and rankle like the memories of wrong we have done to those to whom we owe our life.

V

There is only one other thing I want to say. I have already referred to Mr. Barrie's *Margaret Ogilvy*,

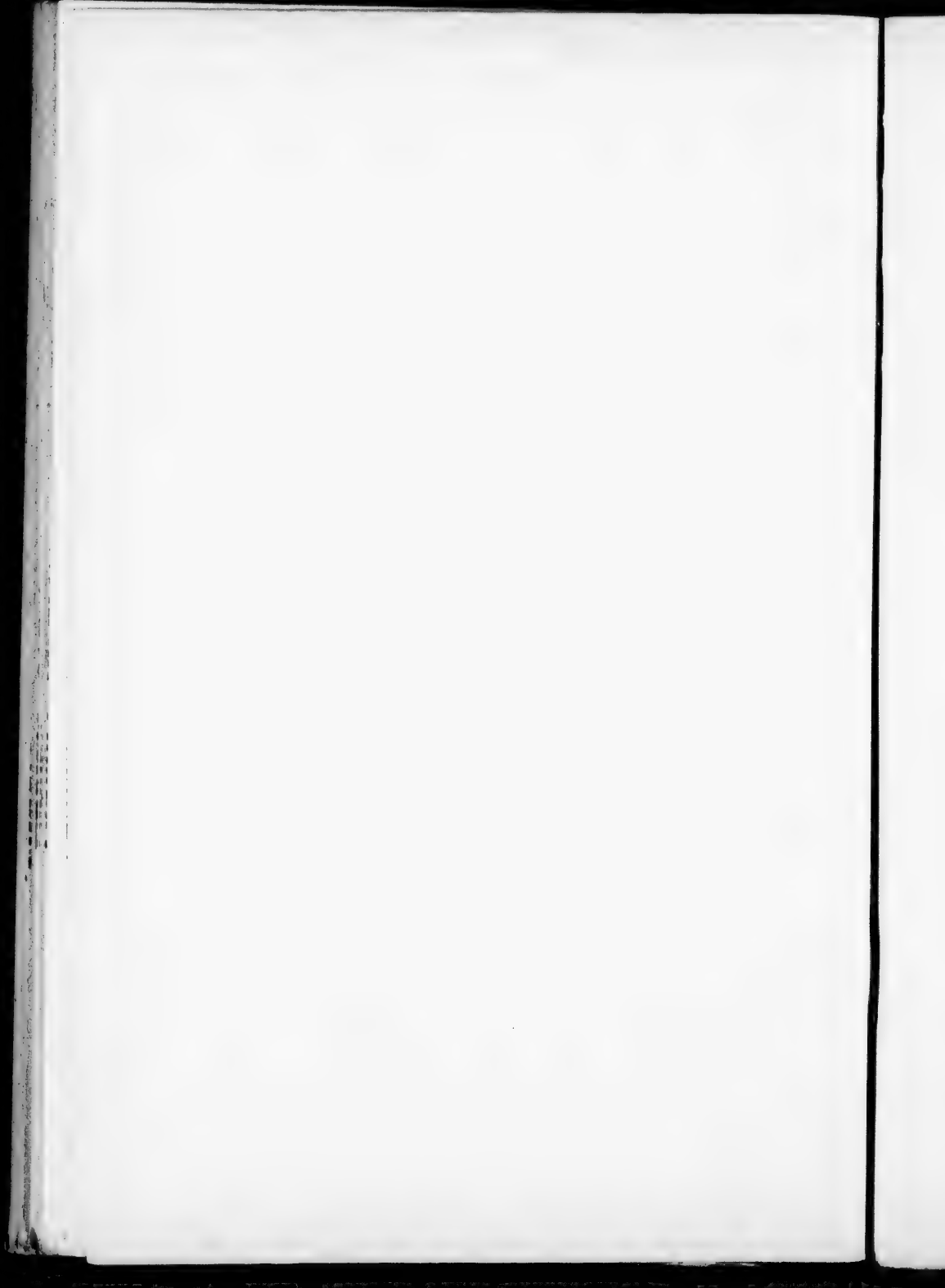
and I want to commend it to you all as the most beautiful comment on the Fifth Commandment that I know. It is a son's tribute to his mother, of reverence and tender beauty all compact. You may think me guilty of exaggeration, but if there is anything quite like it in English literature I do not know where to find it. Ever since he could remember, Mr. Barrie tells us, his one ambition had been to please his mother. When he was a bairn—so his mother used to tell him in after years—he saw nothing bonny, he never heard of her setting her heart on anything, but he flung up his head, and cried, 'Wait till I'm a man.' And when the boy grew to be a man, it was to her that the first hard-earned cheques went. After her death he found the envelopes that had contained them in a box, with a bit of ribbon round them. When he began to write books, it was love of her that made him write, it is she who wanders up and down through all his pages. 'In her eyes,' he says, 'I have read all I know and would ever care to write. For when you looked into my mother's eyes you knew, as if He had told you, why God sent her into the world—it was to open the eyes of all who looked to beautiful thoughts; and that is the beginning and end of literature.' And when, very early, fame came to the son, it made no difference; there was no one in all the world he cared for as the little old woman with her thin wasted hands and dainty white mutch; at a single word he would

hurry off on a long journey to see her, and when he was away he was never so busy that he had not time to write her daily. 'My thousand letters,' he says, 'that she so carefully preserved, always sleeping with the last beneath the sheet, where one was found when she died—they are the only writing of mine of which I shall ever boast. I would not there had been one less, though I could have written an immortal book for it.' And when the end came, he could look back and say: 'Everything I could do for her in this life I have done since I was a boy; I look back through the years, and I cannot see the smallest thing left undone. . . . Those eyes that I could not see until I was six years old have guided me through life, and I pray God they may remain my only earthly judge to the last.'

'Happy he

With such a mother! faith in womankind
Beats with his blood, and trust in all things high
Comes easy to him, and though he trip and fall,
He shall not blind his soul with clay.'

God give us many mothers like Margaret Ogilvy,
and many sons like James Matthew Barrie!



THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

'Thou shalt do no murder.'—EXODUS xx. 13.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

WE begin to-day the consideration of the second half of the Ten Commandments. It has already been pointed out, in the address on the First Commandment, that the starting-point of the Decalogue is GOD: to be right practically we must be right theologically, morality is based on religion. Now, with the Sixth Commandment, the opposite and complementary truth comes into sight. Right thoughts of God are meant to issue in a right relation to our fellow-men: he that loveth God must also love his neighbour as himself. 'If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.' Non-Christian moralists have sometimes had severe things to say concerning the immorality of so-called religious men; but if you want to read the sharpest condemnation of them that think they are well-pleasing to God while their hearts are filled with all malice and bitterness towards their fellow-men, read the Bible. Immediately following, therefore, upon the Commandments designed to establish man's true relation Godward, come four great laws for the safeguarding of man's life, his home, his possessions, his character.

And finally, in the Tenth Commandment, passing beyond overt acts of crime, the law lays its hand upon that evil in man's heart which is the root of so much evil in his life : 'Thou shalt not covet.'

Is it still urged that the Decalogue is a rough and imperfect code of human duty, that even as a list of negative precepts it is far from complete ; that there is a whole catalogue of vices of which it takes no account whatever ? Then again I reply, let a man set to work to carry out its precepts, not only in the letter, but also in the spirit, not only as they were first given by Moses, but as they were interpreted anew by Jesus Christ, and above all, let him lay to heart the last of the Commandments, and he will not again speak with any hasty disrespect of the morality of Sinai. At the same time, it may be readily granted that there is no attempt in the Decalogue to set forth the whole duty of man. It is not a complete code, but rather—as Principal Dykes has said—'the first draft of a code,' and the Ten Words are to be taken 'as so many titles or headings, under each of which you must range a whole section of civil or criminal law.' Yet in so far as this is so, is it at all to be wondered at ? If, as the politician is never weary of telling us, it is impossible to legislate in advance of public opinion, still more is it necessary, in all moral legislation, to have regard to the character and attainments of those for whom it is provided. The Sermon on the Mount on the lips of

Moses would have been as impracticable as the Decalogue on the lips of Christ would have been inadequate. And we have only to think ourselves back to the times in which the Decalogue was given, to realize what an immense step was taken in the moral education of the world when this ancient law was proclaimed from Mount Sinai.

I

Let us turn now to the consideration of the Sixth Commandment, both as we have it here in outline, and as it is filled in for us by the later legislation. And the same characteristics which we find so often in the legislative enactments of the Old Testament—that large sanity, that clear-sighted wisdom, that broad and even-handed justice, which have not always received their full meed of recognition at the hands of readers and critics, meet us here again in the provisions of the Jewish law for the protection of human life. Of course I do not mean that that law, in all or any of its forms, could be transferred to our own statute-book; but the spirit which lies behind it is one of which we can never have too much, and of which we usually have too little in the legislation of to-day.

Of the Cities of Refuge which Moses established for the manslayer in cases of 'accidental or justifiable homicide,' as we should call them, it is not necessary

for me to speak. But there were two remarkable provisions of the Jewish law of murder which will illustrate what I have just said, and to which I wish briefly to refer.¹ 'It was the custom among some Eastern races,' we are told, 'to permit the avenger of the crime of murder to accept compensation in money instead of inflicting death on the criminal.' The result was obvious: the poor man, unable to buy himself off, paid with his life the penalty of a law which the rich man was left free to break almost with impunity. But this the law of Moses forbade: 'Ye shall take no ransom'—so runs the ancient statute (Num. xxxv. 31)—'for the life of a manslayer, which is guilty of death: but he shall surely be put to death.' Is there not a principle here the recognition of which we sometimes seek for in vain in our modern courts of justice? When, *e.g.*, some wealthy scoundrel, by the payment of a heavy fine, which is to him no punishment at all, manages to escape the term of imprisonment which, for the same offence, is meted out to a man whose purse is empty, one wonders what has become of our boasted equality of all men in the eyes of the law. Perfect equality may never be possible—we have no scales of justice firm enough for that,—but a fuller recognition of this principle of the Mosaic legislation might at least bring us one step nearer towards it.

Again, in Exodus xxi. 28, 29, we read: 'If an ox

¹ For the substance of this and the following paragraph I am indebted to Dr. Dale's admirable lecture on the Sixth Commandment.

gore a man or a woman, that they die, the ox shall be surely stoned, and his flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be quit. But if the ox were wont to gore in time past, and it hath been testified to his owner, and he hath not kept him in, but that he hath killed a man or a woman; the ox shall be stoned, *and his owner also shall be put to death.*' Ignoring the details, which in no way concern us, is there not, underlying this law, a theory of responsibility which would admit of some very useful applications to-day? When, *e.g.*, a man in a fit of intoxication commits some terrible crime, the person who sold to him the drink which caused the intoxication would, if the principle of this Mosaic statute were adopted, be made to share in the consequences of his act. As a matter of fact, this principle is so far embodied in the liquor laws of Canada and some other of our colonies that it is therein provided, 'that wherever any person comes to his death by suicide or otherwise during intoxication, the seller of the liquor that caused the intoxication is liable to an action for damages.'¹ And eminent judges in our own country have more than once expressed from the bench their regret that the law did not allow them to summon the publican, whose drink had been the direct cause of a crime, to stand in the dock with the prisoner and share with him in his punishment. Take another illustration. Some two or three years ago, through

¹ See *Chambers's Encyclopædia*, art. 'Liquor Laws.'

the blundering of a railway signalman, a terrible accident happened on the main line between Edinburgh and London. As a consequence, the signalman was committed to take his trial for manslaughter. But when the trial came on such evidence was forthcoming as to the shamefully long hours during which, without a break, the man had been kept at his post, that the jury at once acquitted him. If Moses had had the making of our laws it would not have been the railway servant, but the railway directors, who would have been put upon their trial for so flagrant a neglect of their duty to their employees and to the public.

It is perhaps worthy of note that, in the exposition of this commandment contained in later enactments of the Jewish law, there is nowhere any reference to its application to self-destruction. It is a remarkable fact that, whereas suicide in all civilized countries is said on good authority to be becoming more common year by year, with the Jews length of days was always counted among the greatest blessings which a man might desire, and, as Dean Farrar has pointed out, in all the four thousand years' history covered by the Old Testament there are only three recorded cases of self-destruction. This is not the time nor the place to discuss the change, significant of many things as it is; but do not let us forget that, as Shakespeare tells us, 'the Everlasting' hath 'fix'd His canon 'gainst self-slaughter.'

II

Reverence for human life as a sacred thing—this was the truth which, thus early in its history, was by this commandment implanted deep in the world's heart. The truth may be a truism to-day, but it was not always so, nor is it yet wholly so, except in the sense that a truism is a forgotten truth. 'The idea of man as a conscious, rational, moral individual, of worth for his own sake,' says Principal Fairbairn, 'did not exist in antiquity till it came into being through Israel.' Life was held of no account; murder was of almost every-day occurrence. Why, even in the days of Jeremiah men came to worship in the temple with the stain of blood upon their hands: 'Will ye steal, *murder*, and commit adultery, and swear falsely . . . and (then) come to stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, We are delivered: that ye may do all these abominations?' 'If a man suffer as a Christian,' said St. Peter, writing to Christians, 'let him not be ashamed'; but 'let none of you suffer *as a murderer*, or a thief, or an evil-doer, or as a meddler in other men's matters.' Among ourselves it was but yesterday that duelling was made illegal, and as recently as the last century ruthless laws 'made it a capital crime to cut down a cherry-tree, and strung up twenty young thieves of a morning in front of Newgate.'¹

¹ See John Richard Green's *Short History*.

And even yet, 'when a Mammonite mother kills her babe for a burial fee,' and organized societies are necessary to save little children from the fiendish cruelty of their inhuman parents, the day has not come when we no longer need to proclaim this ancient law of God.

Nevertheless, an immense change has come even within the memory of living men. Only this very week I read in the pages of a London newspaper a searching editorial note on the alleged cruel treatment of a nameless marine on board one of our guardships. '*We shall not lose sight of this case,*' said the writer as he put down his pen. And it is that eager vigilance in the cause of the weak and the poor, that reverence for the rights of the meanest among the dumb millions in our land, which marks one of the great lines of cleavage between the old world and the new. The change, I say, is an immense one; what has wrought it? Many causes, doubtless, have contributed; but the *beginning* of the new order of things is here in the new conception of the sacredness of life which was given to Israel by the lips of Moses. Our magnificent hospitals and infirmaries, with their countless appliances for the mitigation of human suffering, which are among the chiefest glories of our time, and the great medical profession, with its eager search after knowledge that may enable it to prolong life and soften pain, and make death less terrible—this mighty tree of human sympathy and

skill, whose branches fill the whole earth, and whose leaves are for the healing of the nations, is it not rooted in that reverence for human life to which this Sixth Commandment gave such early expression, and which it has done so much to sustain and strengthen?

III

When from exposition we turn to application, we are met at once by two questions without a discussion of which no Young Men's Debating Society syllabus used to be considered complete—I mean, Capital Punishment and War. The relation of the Sixth Commandment to these venerable topics—which is all that concerns us just now—may be stated in a sentence or two. As to the former, it is clear that the commandment did not forbid it. 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed'—so ran the stern old statute; and not for the crime of murder alone, but for many other offences was the extreme penalty of the law inflicted among the Jews. It is useless, therefore, to appeal to the authority of the Decalogue in our discussion of the question of Capital Punishment to-day; the matter must be settled on quite other grounds. Similarly in regard to War. War may be sometimes a stern necessity and duty; and only they who are 'drunk with the thin, sour wine of a remorseless logic' will be able to discover anything in this commandment to forbid it. On the

other hand, let us not forget—especially in view of the monstrous statements recently made in our city by a distinguished military gentleman¹—that unjust wars, wars that are prompted by the lust of empire or commercial greed, wars with weak and half-civilized peoples on pretexts that we should never dare to breathe if we were treating with a great European power, wars, alas! such as stain the latest pages of our own history—such wars are condemned, not only by the Sixth Commandment, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. And therein is justified Hosea Biglow's creed, which, thank God, is coming to be the creed of multitudes who might shrink from putting their faith into his queer, quaint words—

'Ez fer war, I call it murder,—
There you hev it plain an' flat ;
I don't want to go no furdur
Than my Testyment fer that ;
God hez said so plump an' fairly,
It's ez long ez it is broad,
An' you've gut to git up airly
Ef you want to take in God.
'Taint your eppyletts an' feathers
Make the thing a grain more right ;
'Taint a follerin' your bell-wethers
Will excuse ye in His sight ;
Ef you take a sword an' dror it
An go stick a fel' - thru,
Guv'ment aint to answer for it,
God 'll send the bill to you.'

¹ The reference was to an address delivered before the members of the Philosophical Institution by Lord Wolseley.

This is but one out of many applications of the commandment that are loudly called for by our life to-day. Murder happily is with us of comparatively rare occurrence; but the meshes of man's law are very wide, and it may be there are some who would be horror-struck if they were charged with that crime, to whom, nevertheless, God will one day have something to say concerning His law. 'Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small.' I do not want to speak wildly, or forgetful of the network of circumstances not of their own making by which many are bound so that they cannot do the thing they would. But when I read the life of a man like Lord Shaftesbury, and think of the legalized horrors through which, inch by inch, he fought his desperate way, then unless my Bible is only so much waste paper, for them that cared more for gold than for suffering women and children there is a heavy day of reckoning coming.

'The child's sob in the silence curses deeper
Than the strong man in his wrath,'

and that curse of the little child has entered into the Divine ear, to fall again like fiery hail upon the head of the oppressor. When I think of lives wasting away in unsanitary dwellings and workshops, of the white slaves of England doomed to stagger on under their weary burdens of unending toil till at last they drop worn out into premature graves, and then of those who, like vultures fattening on human carrion,

are growing rich out of the wretchedness and degradation of their fellows—verily, if there be a God that judgeth in the earth, He shall search out this also.

Ay, but if we begin to speak of 'bloodguiltiness' we shall need to go on ; we cannot stop there. Did you ever read this ancient law from the book of Deuteronomy : 'When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof'? Why was that? The roof of an Eastern house was flat, and if there were no protection some one walking on it might fall over and be killed ; therefore, said the law, 'thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof *that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence.*' Not for the owner's sake simply—he might walk in safety,—but for the sake of others, the battlement must be built. You may drink wine and play cards and do many things without risk to yourself ; but before you finally settle the matter, what about your children? what about the young men and women who visit at your house? will they not need the battlement? Take heed 'that thou bring not blood upon thine house.' Or, listen to this that God spake unto Israel by His prophet : 'If the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned, and the sword come, and take any person from among them ; he is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand.' Every one has somebody to answer for : the minister his people, the leader his

members, the teacher his class, the parents their children. Ministers, leaders, teachers, parents, can we stand up and testify as Paul did before the Ephesian elders, 'I am pure from the blood of all men'? Can we? Yonder in the city of Bethel is a double grave where lie the bones of a man of God who turned aside from duty and was slain, and beside them the bones of an old prophet who should have been his friend but was his tempter, and led him down to death. The young man was taken away in his iniquity, but his blood will be required at the watchman's hands. Are we making for ourselves an unquiet grave like that in which to lie down at the last?

'It was said to them of old time, thou shalt not kill'—this time it is Christ who is the speaker,—'but I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment.' And John puts it even more strongly: 'Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer.' Ah! brethren, this old commandment has more teeth than we thought. Pride, envy, malice, hate—these are murder microbes; give them their opportunity and they will bring forth death. 'Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer'—does not that word judge some of us? You never lifted a hand against a fellow-man? No; but you struck at his fair name, his honour, his reputation; you thrust at him with the shafts of envy, you stabbed him with the poisoned daggers of hate; and if the tell-tale crimson stain had followed the

stroke, you would be sitting red-handed in church to-night. Is there one of us who can wipe his mouth and say, 'I have never done this wickedness'? Have we not all need to cry aloud, 'Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation,' and to pray with all the passion of our being, 'Incline our hearts, O Lord, that in all its breadth and length and depth and height, we may keep this law of Thine'?

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THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

‘Thou shalt not commit adultery.’—EXODUS xx. 14.

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

IT was pointed out in the previous address that the Sixth, Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Commandments were meant to safeguard, as far as law can, man's life, his home, his possessions, his character, respectively. The Seventh Commandment flings up its rampart round the home, by declaring the sanctity and inviolability of the marriage tie.

I

It is very interesting and instructive to mark the various steps by which the high Christian ideal of marriage has been attained. Only by slow and painful stages has man entered into full possession of the truth. When we turn to the Old Testament we find that the patriarchs had their concubines. Moses, 'because of the hardness of their hearts,' suffered a man to give to his wife a bill of divorce-ment, and to put her away, sometimes even on the most trivial pretext. Yet even in the Old Testament we can trace the movement towards a purer ideal. One of the favourite figures under which the prophets

delight to set forth the relation of Jehovah to His people is that of husband and wife; and the beautiful *Song of Songs*—one of the most misunderstood books of the Bible—is in reality a lovely poem in honour of a simple maiden's love which, through all the allurements of Solomon and his court, remains steadfast to its first and early choice.

But it was not until Christ came that the Christian law of marriage was fully revealed; and to the key of His great words all the New Testament teaching on the subject is pitched. Husbands are to love their wives 'even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself up for it.' The Church, according to Paul's tender and beautiful image, is the Bride of Christ; and the holy estate of Matrimony—as the marriage service of the Anglican Church, paraphrasing the Apostle's words, puts it—signifies unto us the mystical union that is between Christ and His Church. Higher than this it is impossible to go. From the coarse animalism of a bygone day we have reached at last the ideal of a 'high, mysterious union, which nought on earth may break,' 'the pure espousal of Christian man and maid' of which John Keble sings.

Not only has there been a development in the marriage ideal itself, but there has been, since Christ's day, a steadily growing apprehension, by Christian men and women, of the full significance of His teaching. Let me give an illustration of what I mean. Modern readers of Shakespeare are sometimes shocked

at the almost brutal frankness with which the great dramatist speaks of the relations between the sexes. Not that Shakespeare was really less reverent than we, who, indeed, sometimes push our reserve to false and fatal extremes. Nevertheless, there is a delicate reticence on this subject instinctive—may I not say?—to all pure-minded men to-day which the world of Shakespeare never knew.

Yet, notwithstanding this twofold development, no thoughtful mind can escape the conclusion that in regard to this whole question we are living in days big with perilous possibilities for the future. It is amazing to behold the light-heartedness with which some to-day are seeking to re-open questions which ought to be regarded as closed for ever, and, blind to all the lessons of history, do not hesitate to tamper with institutions with whose strength and purity is bound up all that is fairest and holiest in life. Here is one example of the kind of thing that is being written and said by some in our midst just now—I quote the words of two writers from a book for which they are conjointly responsible: the ideal of marriage which they desire to see substituted for the existing one is, they tell us, 'an association terminable at the will of either party'; and they further go on to say that when that has come to pass for which they hope, there will be 'no vestige of reprobation weighing on the dissolution of one tie and the forming of another,' or, I presume, of any number. And when

to this direct advocacy of the claims of whatsoever is vile and bestial in man we add the sickening revelations of our courts of justice, the increased facilities for obtaining divorce, the worse than pagan immorality of some of our literature, the hideous social vice which is the foulest blot on the life of our great cities, and the grinding poverty which, at one end of the social scale, makes common decency as difficult as, at the other end, idle luxury makes the grossest sensualism easy. It is no wonder that the hearts of some of us who are not pessimists sometimes fail us, and we begin to ask what the end of these things will be. Robertson of Brighton once declared that there are two rocks upon which every man must either anchor or split—God and woman. This is not less true of the community than of the individual. I do not wish to indulge in mournful prophecies, but if doctrines like those of which the above is an example should ever become the commonly accepted beliefs of the people of this land—which God in His mercy forbid!—this great nation will assuredly end at last among the breakers. It is no sour and narrow Puritan, but one of the ripest scholars and thinkers of our time, who has told us that ‘when home life, with its sanctities, its simplicity, its calm and deep joys and sorrows, ceases to have its charm for us in England, the greatest break-up and catastrophe in English history will not be far off.’

II

This is why it is impossible for a Christian minister to be silent on the subject raised by the Seventh Commandment: the issues involved are so tremendous and far-reaching. Yet the difficulties in the way of plain and honest speaking are well-nigh insuperable. A man may resolve to shun idle and toothless generalities and tell the whole truth in simple and unequivocal language, and he may do so with all sincerity of purpose and singleness of aim; and yet, when he has finished, he may be haunted with the fear that, so far at least as many of those who have listened to him are concerned, it were better if he had never spoken at all, for they will but wrest his best-intentioned words to their own destruction. How is it possible for me—how is it possible for any one—to say, in the presence of a mixed and miscellaneous throng, one-half of what somebody ought to say to us all?

‘What somebody ought to say to us all’: but that ‘somebody’ is not the preacher, but you fathers and mothers. That which is not possible in the pulpit ought to be felt to be imperative in the home. If parents did their duty there would be little need for others to speak at all. God forbid that I should speak harshly in a matter where the right way must always be a difficult way; but there is something almost criminal in the blank ignorance concerning

themselves in which fathers and mothers so often allow their sons and daughters to go out into the world. I know what keeps so many of us silent; it is that same feeling of reticence to which I have already referred; and under other circumstances it can easily justify itself; but here reticence may mean ruin. But, you say, will they not find out these things soon enough for themselves? They will—you cannot keep your children tied to the table leg all their days—but with this difference: that instead of having you as their teacher, they will learn the lesson perchance at the devil's desk, and some day, when your heart aches for consequences that a wise and timely word might have averted, they will turn upon you and ask, 'Why did not *you* tell us of these things? You who knew, why did you send us out, ignorant as babes, into the midst of a cruel and seducing world?'

And therefore I shall make no attempt, by anything that I say now, to carry any other man's responsibility. Every parent must bear his own burden. The proper sermon on the Seventh Commandment can never be proclaimed on the house-tops by the preacher; it must be whispered in secret by lips of love. I have very little to say, therefore, of the particular sin named in this commandment, or of its kindred sins; and at the risk of myself lapsing into 'generalities,' I must be content to translate this law of God into the language of St. Peter: 'I beseech you, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul'; or of

St. Paul's exhortation to Timothy, 'Keep thyself pure,' and in that form seek to urge it on the heart and conscience of us all.

III

And to begin with, let a man not think it a strange thing that this temptation, in one form or another, come upon him to try him. Let him lay his account for it, and be prepared for it, and gird up the loins of his soul to meet it, that it take him not by surprise, and so gain an advantage over him. Then let him summon into the field every available motive to be his ally in this Holy War of soul with sense. Begin, if you will, with the lowest. Think of the physical consequences by which sins of the flesh are wont to avenge themselves. Think, too, of that defilement of the whole inner man which follows so surely in their train. 'When lust,' says John Milton, in a poem that a young man can never read too often—

'By unchaste looks, loose gestures and foul talk,
But most by lewd and lavish act of sin,
Lets in defilement to the inward parts,
The soul grows clotted by contagion.'

Above all, if some day, another life linked with yours, you hope to stand at those crystal gates that open on the pure and holy joys of wedded life, then for love's sweet sake keep thyself pure. There is a very powerful passage in a work of modern fiction (I make the

quotation at second-hand only) in which a man who had dwelt in Sodom in his younger days tries in vain to win the woman who could and would have loved him had he been the pure man she believed he was—

“You would have loved me, then, if I had lived a different life?” he said.

“Yes,” she answered simply, “I should have loved you. You were born for me. Why, oh why, did you not live for me?”

“I wish to God I had,” he answered.

“You meant to marry always,” she said. “You treasured in your heart your ideal of a woman. Why could you not have lived so that you would have been her ideal too, when at last you met?”

“I wish to God I had,” he repeated . . . And that,’ says the writer from whose pages I make the quotation, ‘was his retribution, the fiery hail that swept over his life and left it scorched and sterile: they lose the power of loving, and become unfit for any pure and noble love.’

And besides all this, it may be that some of us will need to practise a rigorous self-discipline and self-suppression. ‘If thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee. And if thy right hand causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body go into hell.’ And just as a commander will sometimes abandon and destroy his outworks that he

may concentrate all his forces on the citadel; so sometimes a man must limit himself that he may be safe. Precisely how this principle is to be applied each one must determine for himself. For some of us it may mean that there are columns of the daily paper that we had better never read, and pictures on which we had better never look, and books between whose covers we had better never glance, and companionships we may not safely cherish another twenty-four hours, and places of amusement which, harmless as they may be to some, are to us the very vestibule of hell. Do not mistake me. This is not the parrot-cry of a sour and crabbed Puritanism that would rob life of all its colour and leave it only a dull and dreary drab; it is the simple dictate of prudence and of common-sense. First of all make life safe; decorate it afterwards if you will. But if we are more anxious about what we call the 'many-sidedness' of life than about its security, some day the crash will come and decorations and all will topple into the dust together.

But we have not reached the root of the matter even yet. It is 'out of the heart,' Christ said, proceed evil thoughts, fornications, adulteries, all the things that defile a man; and therefore it is at the heart's door that the sentinel must be set and the ceaseless vigil kept; keep *thyself*. 'My strength is as the strength of ten'—so sang the brave Sir Galahad—'because my heart is pure.' But when through the

heart's open door troops of evil thoughts enter unchallenged, then, in the day when the battle rages fierce and loud around the city of Mansoul, she will find a traitorous host entrenched within her midst, ready and eager to betray her into the hands of her foe.

IV

How then shall a young man keep his heart? Let him learn to avoid the empty heart. You remember Christ's parable of the chamber swept, garnished, and empty, into which enter the seven devils in all their diabolical completeness. 'Whatsoever things are true,' says St. Paul, 'whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report—think on these things'; that is, fill up your life with high and holy interests, bind yourself by a hundred ties to the good, the beautiful, and the true. There is always peril to a ship in a storm when it is held by a single cable. Have all your anchors out, and you may outride the wildest night of temptation. Or, to change the figure, let a man make to himself friends of the things that are just and pure and lovely and of good report, and in the day of battle he will find that they have become his allies to stand by his side and to fight for his salvation. The young men and women for whom I fear in a big city are they who do not know what to do with their

leisure hours. If a young woman cares for nothing better than lounging idly about the streets, if a young man finds his chief delight in watching the antics of a ballet-girl on the boards of a third-rate theatre, the devil is likely to find them both an easy prey. But they who have acquired a passion for books, for music, for painting, who can lose themselves in the pursuit of some worthy and ennobling interest, will find that base and vulgar temptations, before which others fall, do not so much as come near them.

But mightier than all these may be the pure love of a good man or woman. Do not laugh at the devotion of young lovers. Such love may be God's guardian angel, strong as it is fair, sent, like the white-winged messengers that of old took Lot by the hand, to lead them away from the city of Destruction.

‘Indeed I know

Of no more subtle master under heaven
Than is the maiden passion for a maid,
Not only to keep down the base in man,
But teach high thought, and amiable words
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,
And love of truth, and all that makes a man.’

Yet with all our keeping, the heart is never surely kept till it is kept by Christ. ‘Whatsoever things are pure, and just, and lovely, and of good report—think on these things’: but Paul was the last man in the world to stop short at any ‘things,’ good and true as they may be. We are never safe till we are saved, saved by Christ. Do not call that a preacher's empty

catchword; it is a truth writ large in the life of every day.

Some of you will remember Charles Kingsley's description of Sir Richard Grenville: 'Lovely to all good men, awful to all bad men; in whose presence none dare say or do a mean or ribald thing; whom brave men left feeling themselves nerved to do their duty better, while cowards slipped away, as bats and owls before the sun.' We have all known men like that, men whose very presence was a call to purity, whom only to be with made it easier to do right, harder to do wrong. But to have Christ with us, not at rare and far-off moments of our life, but with us 'all the days' by our side and in our heart—what might that not do for us? And that it is which in the Gospel is offered to all.

Do I speak to any who have been tempted and have fallen, whose hour of trial has been their hour of weakness, who had not learned to say with Joseph, 'How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' Do not confess to me; it is not for me to pry into the secrets of any man's heart; make your confession unto God. And though because of your sin you may have to go softly all your days, and though there be consequences that even confession cannot undo, yet with Him there is mercy, with Him there is cleansing.

There is a wonderful little story in the Old Testa-

ment which tells how, when David had fallen into grievous sin, the Lord sent Nathan unto him. 'Wherefore,' cried the prophet, 'hast thou despised the word of the Lord, to do that which is evil in His sight? Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from thine house. And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord.' One short, sharp cry of penitence—only two words in the Hebrew—and then, swift as the thunderclap answers the lightning-flash, 'Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin: thou shalt not die.' 'And if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

‘Thou shalt not steal.’—EXODUS XX. 15.

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

IT is a very superficial view of the Ten Commandments that regards them only as a string of negative precepts. They are rather the embodiment and expression of certain great Divine ideas. Thus, the First and Second set forth respectively the unity and spirituality of the Divine Being; from the Fifth we learn that the family is a Divine institution; the Sixth stands for the sacredness of human life; and, similarly, the Eighth is the embodiment of the idea which underlies our phrase, 'the sacredness of property.'

I hesitate somewhat to use the phrase 'sacredness of property,' because of the greed and tyranny which have so often sheltered themselves behind it. And in these days, when 'property' is so well able to take care of itself, it is usually more necessary to draw attention to its duties than to plead for its rights. Nevertheless, however the phrase may have been abused, it represents a great truth. The old distinction between *meum* and *tuum* is recognized and sanctioned by Scripture. The Bible lends no support

to the famous saying of Proudhon that 'property is theft.' If a man had not secured to him the results of the work of his own hands or brain, if no one could say that the things which he possessed were his own, commerce would be paralyzed, civilized societies would cease to exist. It may often be impossible to defend the methods by which many have come into their possessions—and no book in the world speaks a plainer language on that matter than does the Bible—yet this does not affect the general principle of the right of individual ownership. And it is this principle, that a man may enjoy possessions which belong to himself alone, and which no other may take from him, which lies behind the prohibition of the Eighth Commandment.

All that appears simple and obvious enough, and, so long as one is content to deal in general principles of that kind, few will disagree. But it is the minor premise in the syllogism of morals that is usually the most important. Say 'Dishonesty is wrong,' and nobody dissents; but go on to lay your finger on individual practices that are dishonest, and immediately you are greeted with a chorus of angry, protesting voices. Yet, difficult as the attempt may be, it is of little use preaching on the Eighth Commandment unless one is prepared to make it. Without, therefore, being unmindful of general principles, my chief business just now is, if I may so put it, to lay this commandment alongside our modern life, and to

mark what applications of it are called for by the circumstances of to-day.

It is very disappointing to learn, on the authority of Canon Barnett, that in the East End of London—a district which he knows as few men living know it—there has been during the last twenty years ‘a decrease of old-fashioned honesty.’ ‘Stealing and lying,’ he says, ‘no longer rank among the chief vices. . . . There is much talk about what is right in little matters, but the “robust conscience” which damns as wrong any departure from simple honesty and truth is often wanting.’ This is very saddening, yet I should only be wasting my breath in condemning here the vulgar thefts of the pickpocket or the burglar. It is no use preaching to a congregation that is not present, and the first and simplest application of the Eighth Commandment is rather the business of a prison chaplain than of a minister to an ordinary Christian congregation. But men may break this law of God though they never rob a till, nor forge a cheque, nor break into their neighbour’s house ; and it is this wider interpretation of the commandment that is our present concern.

I

Closely related to our subject is a problem which is already profoundly exercising the minds of many, and to which as the national conscience becomes

more enlightened, we shall be compelled to address ourselves. The problem is this: how to secure a juster distribution of the fruits of industry among those by whose toil, whether of hands or of brain, they have been produced. As we believe that the Eighth Commandment is a law of God, we cannot much longer put that problem by. Of course, we are not without many proffered solutions; and some of them are nothing if they are not drastic. In which of these the real solution lies—if, indeed, it lies in any of them—it is not for me to say. The time for a final judgment is not yet come. But meanwhile we are slowly feeling our way to one or two great truths.

In the first place, we know now that there is a problem to be solved. We are not blind to what has been done. Our boasted progress during the last sixty years, of which we have lately heard so much, is not a myth, thank God, but a splendid reality. Neither are we the victims of foolish delusions, seeking after an unreal and impossible 'equality.' And yet it is idle to pretend that we are satisfied. While wealth accumulates in the hands of the few at the same time that multitudes, of whose labour that wealth is in large part the creation, are left to struggle in a slough of poverty from which there is no escape save the workhouse or the grave—I say, so long as these things are so, because we believe in God we dare not be satisfied. It must be possible to find a larger and a truer justice.

It is our search for this wider justice that is revealing to us the great truths of which I speak, and of which, significantly enough, the most fitting expression is often to be found in the language of the New Testament. 'The husbandman that laboureth,' says St. Paul, 'must be the first—the first—to partake of the fruits.' The political economist may shake his head; but the conscience of this nation is yielding its assent more and more to this doctrine of the Apostle, and the day is not far distant when it will be accepted as a first principle in the adjustment of the rival claims of capital and labour. Indeed, the political economists themselves are beginning to recognize its justice. This is how one of them—Professor Graham, of Belfast—addresses the great capitalists of our day: 'Your great capital,' he says, 'by giving you a kind of monopoly, enables you to crush or keep out rivals, to raise or keep up prices, and to a considerable extent to dictate terms to your hands. But would it not be more prudent to conciliate the latter, and to draw them to your side by good wages? If you do not, it may be the worse for you. For there is a kind of feeling arising that your lot in modern days is really too fortunate; and then there is a doubt as to the sources of your capital, a suspicion that, however juridically unimpeachable its title, it is not all morally yours; and when such a feeling arises, if not overcome by your good deeds in other directions, there are ways in which it can

make itself felt to your disadvantage. Correct, then, the possible defects in your title by justice to your workers, and afterwards by generous benefactions; lest the time should come when your profits may be taken from you, and you may have to content yourself with the manager's salary, or less than the present scale of remuneration.' You may call that 'Socialism' if you like—really, of course, it is nothing of the kind—but whatever name you give to it, it will be well for all of us if they to whom these words are addressed give heed to them.

Another great truth, the full significance of which is perhaps only yet beginning to come home to us, may also be stated in the words of St. Paul: 'None of us liveth to himself.' All are dependent upon the service of others; therefore do all owe service of one kind or another. That does not mean that the artist is to lay aside his brush, and the poet his pen, and turn hodman or scavenger. No; our gifts indicate our service and bind us to it; what a man can best do he should be left free to do, for in so doing he best serves the community. But inasmuch as all live by the community, all are bound, in their own measure and capacity, to live for it; he who is continually receiving from it, and yet yields to it nothing in return, is an enemy of society of the very worst kind; and therein is that startling saying justified, that every man lives by one of two methods, labour or theft. We hear a good deal sometimes

about the 'dangerous classes'; but I say fearlessly the most dangerous classes in English society to-day are not the glib-tongued fellows who preach a revolutionary Socialism at our street corners and in our public parks; they are the idle rich, the 'unemployed' at the other end of the social scale.

What may be the issues of a fuller realization of this fact of the interdependence of each upon all I will not attempt to forecast; but I believe with Thomas Carlyle that 'a day is ever struggling forward, a day will arrive in some approximate degree, when he who has no work to do, by whatever name he may be known, will not find it good to show himself in our quarter of the solar system.' 'If any will not work,' said St. Paul, 'neither let him eat'; we are likely to witness a pretty stringent application of that principle at the hands of the twentieth century; but at which end it will begin, whether with the idle loafer in the streets, or with his aristocratic companion in the West End, remains to be seen.

II

Again, this Eighth Commandment stands in a very intimate relation to that wide and widening circle of difficult ethical problems, sometimes conveniently summed up under the head of 'commercial morality.' Now I am not, and I never was, what is called a 'business man,' and I am not going to speak of what

I do not know. I bring no sweeping charges against the world of commerce, nor shall I discuss the charges that are often brought by others; how far they are true you know better than I. But I want to suggest two or three questions for Christian men of business to ponder. These 'tricks of trade'—no, I am going to mention no examples; I might name half a dozen, and yet leave out the one you know most of—what does Christ think of them, how will they square with His law? That long advertisement you sent to the paper or the printer yesterday—if He had stood by your side as you drew it up, how much would He have struck out? All the chartered accountants in the city may be ready to sign your books; but when Christ comes to audit them—what? Oh, the sham and shoddy that is in the world of commerce to-day! One does not need to be a 'business man' to find that out; it is enough if he be a customer. You remember the grim irony of Carlyle's prayer to Beelzebub which he puts into the lips of men to-day: 'Help us, thou great lord of shoddy, adulteration, and misfeasance, to do our work with a maximum of slimness, swiftness, profit, and mendacity, for the devil's sake. Amen.' And with all these things, doubtless, the devil is well pleased; but Christ—Christ—what does He think about them?

But perhaps I shall be told that, as things are nowadays, it is impossible to have unvarying regard

to high Christian principles, and that, as a matter of fact, if an apprentice or a salesman persisted in introducing considerations of that kind he would speedily be sent about his business, while, so far as the tradesman himself is concerned, the only result would be to turn the tide of custom from his own door to that of some less scrupulous rival. Has it come to this, then, that it is impossible for a business man to be both honest and successful?—for that is what a statement of this kind means, if it means anything at all. I decline to believe it. There have been, and there are still, thank God, thousands—and among them many of the kings and princes of the world of commerce—who have refused to bow the knee to the Baal of trickery and fraud. Take the case of Alexander Balfour, of Liverpool. Balfour went as a young man from the East of Scotland to the banks of the Mersey, determined to succeed; and succeed he did, till at last he stood upon the top rung of the commercial ladder; and yet at every step from first to last—as any one may see who will read his Life—he held himself bound by the moral law of Jesus Christ. And if Alexander Balfour, why not others?

Yet suppose the choice has to be made—that the only alternatives that face a man are ruin or dishonesty—what then? I do not want to speak lightly or forgetful of the temptations that come to some of you, from which I am delivered. But

I know that your own conscience is with me when I say that a Christian cannot hesitate; it is not necessary to make money; it is necessary to do what is right in the sight of God. You had better break stones than break the commandments. Money you can get, and get easily, especially if you are prepared to act upon the wicked old adage that says, 'Get money, get it honestly if you can, but—get money'; but the words of the Hebrew prophet are not yet out of date, as many a man has found to his cost: 'He that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.' You are afraid lest some day you should be gazetted as a 'failure'? Take heed that be not the judgment of the last great day! I have read of one who left this world, his pockets bursting with yellow gold, but across his life God wrote, 'Thou fool!'

'Thou shalt not steal,' and when the final balance is struck it will be well with them, and with them alone, who at all costs have obeyed that law.

III

Let me conclude with one or two further illustrations of the need there is among all classes to-day for a more rigorous application of the Eighth Commandment.

I have already pointed out that this commandment has something to say to employers of labour;

has it not likewise to those who sell their labour? If a tradesman, by the use of unjust weights and measures, defrauds me of one-tenth of the goods which I order and for which I pay, we condemn him without hesitation, and the law, if he be discovered, will visit him with heavy penalties. But suppose I enter into an engagement with an employer to serve him during a fixed number of hours daily, in return for a stipulated payment, and suppose that every day I waste and fritter away an hour of the time which is now, according to the terms of the agreement, no longer mine but his, what essential difference is there between my conduct and that of the fraudulent shopkeeper whose case I have just mentioned? I have only time for a sentence where an essay is needed, but we may be sure that we shall never restore or attain to the true relation between master and servant, between employers and employed, until on both sides there is a more frank and honourable recognition of the obligations that belong to each.

A very curious chapter in the history of morals might be written concerning the way in which some persons habitually disregard the ordinary maxims of honesty when they are dealing no longer with individuals, but with public bodies or the State. Men and women who would scorn to commit a vulgar theft will yet cheat a tramway company or a railway company without scruple; and as for the inaccuracy

of the returns of their income-tax paper, that is almost taken as a matter of course. But if it is wrong to defraud a shopkeeper, is it not also wrong to defraud a railway company? And if it is wrong to steal a loaf of bread, is it only a matter of indifference to ride, say, from Edinburgh to Portobello without paying for your ticket, or of inconvenience, if you happen to be found out? And as for the dues justly claimed by the State, we have no more right to escape their payment than we have to escape the payment of our butcher's or our grocer's bill. If the laws that regulate taxation are unjust, let them be altered; but so long as the laws remain, and so long as we continue to enjoy the benefit of the State's protection, we are bound to take our share of the cost of its maintenance. 'Render to all their dues,' said the Apostle Paul, 'tribute to whom tribute is due'; and a greater than St. Paul bade us render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's.

'Owe no man anything.' That is the next injunction of the Apostle—to which if men would give heed it would often save them from the peril of breaking the Eighth Commandment. The credit system may be a necessity and a boon to some, but it would reduce the worry and anxiety of the world and the temptations to dishonesty by one-fourth or one-half, if at least those of us who know to a penny what our income is made it a rule to purchase nothing

until we have the money in our pocket with which to pay for it.

'Render to *all* their dues'; but is there not one Creditor whom we are always forgetting? *How much owest thou unto my Lord?*

'Will a man rob God?' the old prophet asked in hot indignation; yet we are doing it every day. God has parcelled His estate among us, and some of us have got a little plot, and some of us a big one; but little or big, the plots are all His, not ours; He is the Owner; we are only agents, trustees. Yet we use them for ourselves alone, without one thought of Him who let them out to us, or of those for whose sakes we hold them. And deeper down than that our obligation to Him goes: 'Thou owest unto Me even thine own self besides.' Do we ever think of paying that debt? Ah! brethren, I tell you, when we judge righteous judgment we shall cease to count that man honest who pays the debts he owes his fellow-men and forgets the debt he owes his God.



THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.'
—EXODUS xx. 16.

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

I

'IF all men's sins,' Mr. Spurgeon once said, 'were divided into two bundles, half of them would be sins of the tongue.' It is against these 'sins of the tongue,' or, to speak more accurately, against some of them, that this Ninth Commandment is directed. I say against 'some of them,' for obviously there are many sins of which the tongue is the instrument which are not covered by the prohibition. 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.' The commandment forbids, not untruthfulness in general, but one particular form of untruthfulness. According to its primary meaning, it has in view tribunals of justice, before which men may be summoned to bear witness, and it enjoins upon them—in modern phraseology—to speak 'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.'

We have already seen that, according to the most probable interpretation, the Third Commandment is a prohibition, not only of profanity but also of perjury. The heinousness of the latter sin is thus twice

brought home to us in the Decalogue, which in the first table condemns it as a sin against God, and in the second as a crime against man. And it may not be amiss to emphasize this fact in a day when false swearing in our law-courts is said to be of painful and growing occurrence. When we remember that perjury renders impossible that due administration of justice upon which society depends as the first condition of its existence, we begin to understand how great an enemy to all social well-being is he who defies and breaks this law. The instinct of self-preservation alone would justify society in inflicting on the offender the heaviest and severest penalties.

But though this is the primary meaning, it by no means exhausts the significance of the commandment. There are multitudes of us who never stood in a witness-box in our lives, who have never been under the temptation of swearing falsely. But 'there is another court of justice which sits informally every day and every hour'—I mean the court of Public Opinion, and every day in that court, in our intercourse with others, we are bearing witness that is true or false.

Do not let us affect a foolish contempt for, or indifference to, the decisions of that court. It is true that at times we must ignore it, at times even act in defiance of it. Nevertheless, it has a great and serious function in life; judgment, not indeed upon the motives,

but upon the conduct, of others we must sometimes pass. In the condemnation of false witnessing is implied the approbation of truthful witnessing. God means such judgment to do its work, to aid the right and the true, to thwart the wrong and the false. But if the witnesses swear falsely, that Divine purpose is frustrated, we are robbed of the blessings—not the less real because they are so intangible—which flow from a just and healthy public opinion, and all men thereby are the losers. Therefore does this law of God demand that, in all our judgments of others, we shall be as mindful of the sacred obligations of truth as if we stood before some tribunal armed with power to visit every falsehood with the sternest penalty. There is no kind of injustice or hurt that by our words or by our silence we can do to the name, the honour, the reputation of another that this commandment does not condemn. So that, though, as we have seen, it may not strictly be interpreted as the condemnation of all forms of lying whatsoever, nevertheless its sweep is exceeding broad, it pierces, sharp as any two-edged sword, to the thoughts and intents of the hearts of all of us.

Let us glance, then, at some of the sins which are included within the wide range of this law, 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.' And if at first we were inclined to set down the saying of Mr. Spurgeon with which I began as a preacher's exaggeration, perhaps before I have

finished we shall be ready to admit that, after all, he was not far from the truth.

II

Mark, in the first place, how many and grave are the evils that group themselves under 'sins of the tongue'! Where many witnesses might be called, I must be content to summon two: Language and Scripture.

(1) Rarely can we find a more vivid and impressive revelation of a people's innermost thought and heart than is to be obtained from a careful examination of its language. A nation's life is mirrored in its speech. If, *e.g.*, a people be strangers to certain shades of thought and feeling, the fact will be reflected in a corresponding poverty of language; and of course *vice versâ*. Similarly, as Archbishop Trench has pointed out, in what is perhaps the most interesting chapter in his interesting book on Words, language is a most faithful reflex of the moral life of those who use it. And since, alas! every language possesses, as he says, 'words which are the mournful record of the strange wickedness which the genius of man, so fertile in evil, has invented,' I know of no better annotation of this Ninth Commandment which we could make for ourselves, than just the ugly catalogue of English words that describe the many varieties of sins of the tongue. *The Larger Catechism* makes special mention of unseasonable

speech or loquacity, tale-bearing, back-biting, detraction, aggravating small faults, discovering infirmities, impairing our neighbours' credit, rejoicing in their disgrace and infamy; while a recent writer, himself a distinguished student of language, sets forth the evidence from the words of our mouth in still more striking fashion. 'Calumny, slander, misrepresentation, vituperation, contumely, insult, scurrility, railing, detraction, whispering, backbiting, false witness, depreciation, vilification, insinuation, innuendo, abuse, tattle, insolence, obloquy, sneering, taunting, jibes, jeers, personalities, defamation, libel, satire, sarcasm, lampoon, censoriousness, slashing criticism, pasquinade, tale-bearing, malevolent spitefulness, evil surmisings, attributing motives, the base gossip of busybodies—these,' he says, 'and I know not how many more expressions,' show the ugly exuberance of our language to express the varieties of malice as it finds vent in malignant utterance.

(2) The evidence of Scripture is even more impressive, though I am afraid that few of us have any conception of the large place which this subject fills in the sacred writings. Open the book of Proverbs, and you will find scarcely a single page without some reference to it. Turn from Proverbs to the Psalms, and as Dr. Whyte says, 'You would think that the Psalmists scarcely suffer from anything else worth speaking about but the evil tongues of their friends and their enemies.' The Apostle James, as every

reader of the New Testament knows, is very bold when he touches on this matter. Indeed, as Jowett, the late Master of Balliol, once said, his words are rather too strong for our nerves to-day. Nevertheless, let us hear them again in all their uncompromising directness: 'If any stumbleth not in word,' he says, 'the same is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also'; and again, 'If any man thinketh himself to be religious, while he bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his heart, this man's religion is vain.' But of course Scripture's greatest word on the subject—which I will not weaken by any comment of my own—was spoken by the Master Himself: '*And I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of Judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*'

Not less manifold than their variety is the mischief that is wrought by these 'sins of the tongue.' The slanderer, the tale-bearer, the backbiter, these 'men-slugs and human serpentry'—their slimy trail is everywhere! Chattering, gossiping busybodies are the devil's best allies. One in a church can make a minister's best work fruitless, and do more mischief than twelve months' preaching can undo. Where they come nothing is sacred, and nothing safe. They poison the wine of friendship. They mingle worm-wood and gall in the cup of the saintliest. They rob life of its choicest treasures, its trust, its confidence,

its joy, and in their stead they bring in suspicion and worry and heartache. 'The tongue of a busybody,' says Bishop Hall, 'is like the tails of Samson's foxes; it carries fire-brands, and is enough to set the whole field of the world in a flame.' 'A backbiting tongue hath disquieted many; strong cities hath it pulled down and overthrown the houses of great men.' Or, to go back to the plain, strong words of James: 'Behold how great a forest is kindled by how small a fire! And the tongue is a fire: the world of iniquity among our members is the tongue, which defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the wheel of nature, and is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beasts and birds, of creeping things and things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed by mankind: but the tongue can no man tame; it is a restless evil, it is full of deadly poison.'

III

What are the sources from which these evils spring? They are not due, for the most part, I think, to malicious and murderous intent. Men do, it is true, sometimes deliberately plot and plan to destroy another's good name, as sometimes a murderer will lie in wait for his victim. But, happily, the one crime is as rare as is, comparatively speaking, the other. No; it is from causes wholly different from these that sins of the tongue for the most part spring. We sin with

our tongue, not because we plan, but because—as Bishop Butler says, in a great sermon which Dr. Whyte declares ‘ought to be read at least once a month by all the men and all the women who have tongues in their heads’—we fail to govern and control our tongues. Let me split up that general statement into two or three particulars.

(1) There is, first, the habit of unrestrained talkativeness, or, as Butler puts it, ‘the disposition to be talking abstracted from the consideration of what is to be said, with very little or no regard to, or thought of, doing either good or harm.’

I should be sorry to say a single word that could be construed into a depreciation of the art of conversation. There is nothing more delightful, or more truly educational, than what Johnson calls ‘good talk’; and the conversational art is certainly one in which we in this country are far from being proficient. A great deal has been said and written in praise of the virtues of silence; yet silence may be as barren as any speech; and, after all, what is the writing of books but another way of talking? Every one knows Mr. Morley’s little pleasantries at the expense of Thomas Carlyle and his ‘golden gospel of silence effectively compressed in thirty-five volumes.’ Nevertheless, as the wise man says, ‘In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin.’ The loquacious tongue had need be well bridled and bitted. Great talkers who enjoy the exercise of their gift are always on

the edge of saying more than they know, and, as Paul says about tattlers and busybodies, of speaking things which they ought not. Mr. Talkative may not be an altogether bad fellow, but he is a son of Saywell, who dwells in Prating Row, and he is related both by blood and marriage to many questionable characters; and if we are wise we shall not cultivate too close an acquaintance with him.

(2) Again, there is what Butler calls 'the giving of characters'—'the strong inclination most have to be talking of the concerns and behaviour of their neighbours.'

Judgment upon the conduct of others we are sometimes compelled to pass. To discuss ideas or principles wholly apart from individuals by whom they are illustrated, and in whom, so to speak, they take shape, is never possible for long. Begin to talk politics, and in less than five minutes you will find yourself talking about politicians. Conversation would be a cold and colourless thing indeed if it were always confined to the realm of abstract ideas. 'Women,' says a distinguished woman-writer, 'are born to take an interest in "persons," whatever men may be.' And men, whatever they may say, are not very different. Let all this be granted; yet will any one deny that 'personal talk' fills far too large a place in our general conversation? When we remember how wholly gratuitous and uncalled for most of our judgments of others are; when we think

how difficult—often, how impossible—it is to judge righteous judgment ; when we call to mind what we ourselves have suffered at the hands of ignorant and fussy busybodies, shall we not do well to seek to turn the rising tide of conversation into less dangerous channels? You remember what Wordsworth says—

‘I am not one who oft or much delight
To season my fireside with personal talk.

· · · · ·
Better than such discourse doth silence long,
Long, barren silence, square with my desire.

· · · · ·
Nor can I not believe but that hereby
Great gains are mine : for thus I live remote
From evil-speaking ; rancour never sought,
Comes to me not ; malignant truth, or lie.
Hence have I genial seasons, hence have I
Smooth passions, smooth discourse and joyous thought :
And thus from day to day my little boat
Rocks in its harbour lodging peaceably.’

(3) One other source of evil-speaking may be referred to in a sentence—I mean the habit of exaggeration. Exaggeration, to some of us, may appear a very venial offence ; but as one whose command of exact and accurate speech is equalled by the depth and clearness of his spiritual insight says, he who by habitual, unregarded, unconscious untruthfulness of language breaks ‘the great law that word and fact ought to correspond,’ wrongs and wounds himself even when he does not injure others. It may seem a trifling matter to sacrifice accuracy of

detail in order to give greater colour and force to what we are saying ; but, as the same writer says, the claims of truth would be overwhelming 'if we could only see what comes of the difference between exaggeration and truthful self-restraint in the long-run.'

'Prune thou thy words, the thoughts control
That o'er thee swell and throng ;
They will condense within thy soul,
And change to purpose strong.'¹

IV

How may these sins of the tongue be overcome? The question has been answered in part already. If they spring from a habit of unrestrained talkativeness, we must learn to 'hold our tongue'; if from a too great readiness to pass judgment upon others, we must lay to heart the word of Jesus, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged'; if from a tendency to exaggeration, we must learn to esteem the truth above all things. We must *take heed* unto our ways, that we offend not with our tongue; we must set a watch before our mouth, and keep the door of our lips. And let us not forget there is Another who is watching and listening, in whose presence we continually are. I never speak on a subject like this without feeling

¹ See a sermon entitled 'Strong Words' by Dean Church, in his *Pascal and other Sermons*. Church was a disciple of Butler, and this sermon is in every way worthy of his distinguished master.

the difficulty of investing it with the importance and seriousness which really belong to it. And yet, surely, no one who hears these solemn words of Christ which I have already quoted—'By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned'—can fail to realize how serious and important the subject is. And just as 'we instinctively lower our voice and limit our words when we are in the presence of one whose wisdom or whose greatness awes us,' so let us, realizing at all times the presence of Christ, not only act, but speak, as those who shall one day give account.

And, above all, let this be our daily prayer, 'Create within me a clean heart, O God.' Evil-speaking is the fruit of evil-thinking; and evil-thinking is to be cast out only by a new spirit, even the spirit of love, that 'thinketh no evil.' It has been suggested, I believe, that there may be in the cry of the prophet Isaiah, 'Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips,' some reference to the sin of profanity in his early life. I do not know that there is any truth in the suggestion; but sure I am that we have all need of the purifying fire that touched the prophet's lips, that so our iniquity may be taken away and our sin purged.

'The tongue can no man tame!' Nay, verily; therefore the more earnestly do we need to pray, 'Set *Thou*, O Lord, a watch before my mouth; keep *Thou* the door of my lips.'

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THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

C

'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's.'—*EXODUS xx. 17.*

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

THERE is one very obvious difference between this commandment and all the nine that precede it. In them it is some overt act of evil—idolatry, murder, theft, lying—that is forbidden. But this commandment has to do, not with the words of the mouth, nor with the deeds of the hand, but with the thoughts of the heart. Thus the last word of the Decalogue is its sharpest, most penetrating point. I may do no murder, I may never steal, I may never commit adultery, I may never bow my knee before some idol of wood or stone, but if my heart is in bondage to evil desires, even though as yet they may not have broken forth in evil deeds, this great law of God will not hold me guiltless.

It will help us to realize the true inwardness of this Tenth Commandment if we call to mind the part that it played in the spiritual development of the Apostle Paul. In that priceless fragment of autobiography preserved for us in the seventh chapter of Romans, Paul says : ' I had not known sin, except through the law : for I had not known coveting except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet: but sin, finding

occasion, wrought in me, through the commandment, all manner of coveting.' In the days of his youth, when he sat, an eager student, at the feet of Gamaliel, Paul knew himself innocent of all outward transgressions. As the words of the law fell upon his ear, 'Thou shalt have none other gods before Me,' 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image,' 'Honour thy father and thy mother,' 'Thou shalt not kill,' 'Thou shalt not steal,' like the rich young ruler he could say, 'All these have I kept from my youth up'; in all these things he was blameless. But when the commandment, 'Thou shalt not covet,' came home to him, straightway young Saul of Tarsus knew himself a sinner before God. Like an electric searchlight, it flashed its piercing ray into the dark, unswept corners of his heart, and evil he had never dreamed of lay discovered to his sight: 'The law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?'

C This Tenth Commandment forbids all forms of evil desire whatsoever—as the *Shorter Catechism* has it —'all discontentment with our own estate, envying or grieving at the good of our neighbour, and all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his.' It is a fact of dark and profound significance that, twice over in his Epistles, Paul should name this sin of covetousness in the same breath with 'fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire.'¹ The

¹ Col. iii. 5; Ephes. v. 3, 5.

connection is not one of mere chance. Paul is not a writer who sprinkles his words at random over the page; and when he brackets covetousness with these deadly sins of the flesh, what he means to imply is that these bitter, poisonous fruits grow on the same tree and spring from the same root. Covetousness, envy, pride, wrath—'all these four elements of self,' says William Law, 'are tied together in one inseparable band; they mutually generate and are generated from one another; they have but one common life, and must all of them live or all die together.' I may feel no 'love of pelf,' but 'if I desire anything but that which God would have me to be and do, I stick in the mire of covetousness.'

All this is most true, and we shall do well to lay it to heart. But inasmuch as it is the spirit of Mammonism, the lust for gold, the passion for getting, at whatever cost to ourselves or to others, which forms one of our gravest spiritual perils to-day, it is against this particular form of the sin of covetousness that I want specially to turn this sharp two-edged sword of the Word of God.

And let no one say or think that that is an application of the commandment suitable enough if I were addressing an audience of millionaires, but somewhat out of place here. 'You are more greedy over your mess of pulse,' said Thomas à Becket to a monk one day, 'than I am over my partridge.' And it is not necessary to have ten thousand pounds a year

to forget what Christ said, that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth. The cankerworm of covetousness may devour in the poor man's cottage as well as in the rich man's palace. A penny-piece is not very big, but if you hold it near enough to your eye it will shut out the whole heavens from your vision, and will do it just as effectually as a golden guinea. Therefore it is to the men and women who are holding the penny-pieces of this life so near to them that they never catch so much as a glimpse of what lies beyond that I speak to-day.

I

'*Thou shalt not covet*'—note how the Bible itself italicizes that commandment for us.

Have you observed how the Tenth Commandment bends round—if I may so put it—to meet the First? What is the First Commandment?—'Thou shalt have none other gods before Me.' What is the Tenth?—'Thou shalt not covet.' Now, what says the Apostle Paul? 'Covetousness, *which is idolatry*.' So, then, he who breaks the Tenth Commandment breaks likewise the First, for he sets up an idol in the place of God. This identification of covetousness with idolatry—which, perhaps, more than aught else may help some of us to realise its true character, its hatefulness and heinousness in the sight of God—is not uncommon in the New Testament. 'Ye cannot serve

God and——' What? If we were hearing the quotation for the first time, how should we have expected it to finish?—'Ye cannot serve God and the world,' or 'God and the devil.' But Christ knew that there is no more deadly rival of the love and service of God than the love and service of money, and therefore He said, 'Ye cannot serve God and *Mammon*.' Paul has the same tremendous contrast in his mind, when, writing to Timothy, he bids him 'Charge them that are rich in this present world, that they be not high-minded, nor have their hope set on the uncertainty of riches, but on God.' All covetousness, in the last analysis, is idolatry.

Or read the history of the Bible, and mark along its whole course the names of those whose tragic doom, like some flaring beacon-light on a rock-bound coast, warns us of the sin and peril of covetousness. From the valley of Achor, where they stoned Achan with stones for the trespass which he committed against the Lord; from the vineyard of Naboth, where Ahab the king reddened his hands in the blood of innocency; from the presence of Elisha the prophet, whence Gehazi his servant went out a leper as white as snow; from the house of Haman, where Haman himself perished miserably on the gallows built for Mordecai the Jew; from the field of blood, bought with the price of blood, where the guilty soul of Judas 'flared forth in the dark'; from the double and doubly-dishonoured

grave of Ananias and Sapphira in Jerusalem, comes the solemn warning cry, 'Take heed—take heed—and beware of covetousness.' 'Now I saw in my dream, that at the further side of that plain ["a delicate plain called Ease"] was a little hill called Lucre, and in that hill a silver-mine, which some of them that had formerly gone that way, because of the rarity of it, had turned aside to see; but going too near the brink of the pit, the ground being deceitful under them, broke, and they were slain; some also had been maimed there, and could not to their dying day be their own men again.'

But the most impressive commentary of all on the Tenth Commandment is to be found in the words of Jesus. I shall not soon forget the shock of surprise with which, some years ago, I read an article in one of our theological magazines in which the writer pieced together the teaching of Jesus concerning the use of money. Never before had I realized how large a place that subject filled in His public ministry; and if any one is disposed to murmur because, instead of 'preaching the Gospel,' I have turned aside to speak of this curse of Mammonism, let me say to him that, if we preachers spoke about it as Christ did, there would be not merely an occasional pulpit reference, but a sermon on the subject at least once a month. 'We might have thought,' says John Ruskin, 'if we had been asked what a Divine teacher would be most likely to teach, that He would have left

to inferior persons to give directions about money, and Himself only spoken concerning faith and love and the discipline of the passions and the guilt of crimes of soul against soul. But not so. He speaks in general terms of these. But He does not speak parables about them for all men's memory, nor permit Himself fierce indignation against them in all men's sight. The Pharisees bring Him an adulteress. He writes her forgiveness on the dust of which He had formed her. Another, despised of all for known sin, He recognised as the giver of unknown love. But with a whip of small cords He drives out of the Temple traffickers and thieves ; while the practical command to the only seeker of advice of whom it is recorded that Jesus loved him, is, briefly, about his property : "Sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." Let us turn to the Gospels for ourselves. We have already seen how, over against the love and worship of God, Christ sets the love and worship of Mammon. Listen to Him as He opens His mouth to teach His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, and presently you will hear Him say, 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust doth consume, and where thieves break through and steal ; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth consume, and where thieves do not break through and steal.' The same truth crops out in parable after parable. The seed of

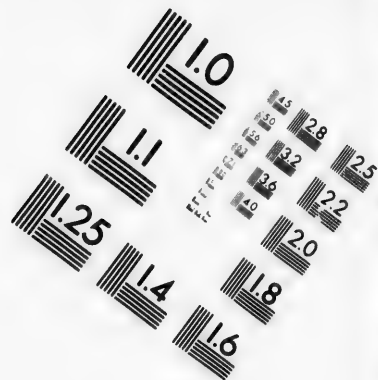
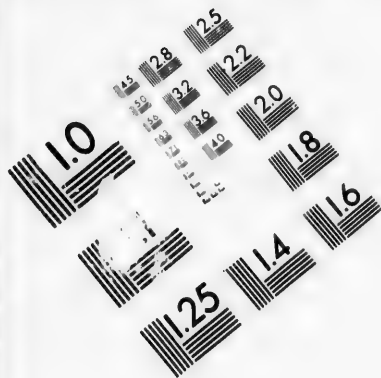
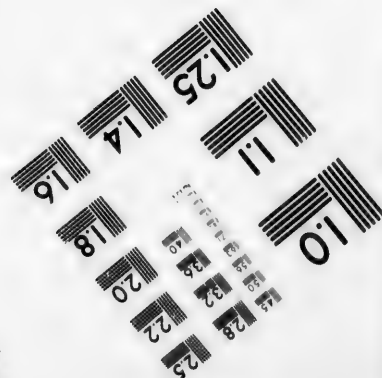
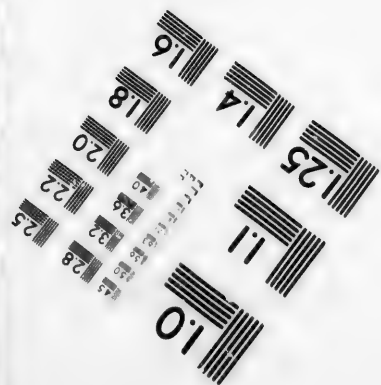
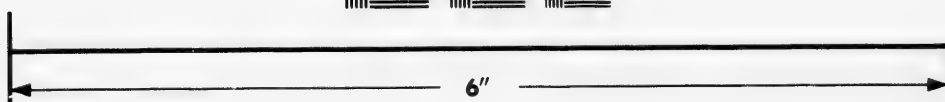
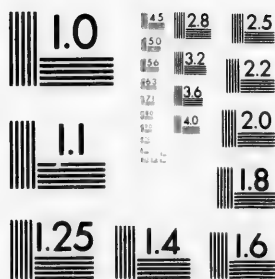


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the Word is choked by 'the care of the world and the deceitfulness of riches'; the unforgiving servant is condemned because, after all his debt had been forgiven him, he went out, and found one of his fellow-servants which owed him a hundred pence, and laid hold on him, and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay what thou owest!' the parables of the Rich Fool and the Prodigal Son forbid alike the selfish accumulation and the wasteful squandering of wealth; and the story of Dives and Lazarus is the tremendous answer of our Lord to the Pharisees 'who were lovers of money,' and who scoffed at His words. Again and again, and yet again, does Christ lift the warning finger and cry, 'Take heed, and beware of covetousness.' If we listen to Him, if we receive Him into our house, our ill-gotten gains will give us no peace till, like Zacchæus, we are ready to vow, 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have wrongfully exacted aught of any man, I restore fourfold.'

II

Do I exaggerate when I say that in this spirit of Mammonism lies our greatest peril to-day? 'The love of money is the root of all evil': the words are a mistranslation, as every reader of the Revised Version knows; yet if the Apostle had actually so

written, they would hardly have been too strong for things as we see them to-day. There is scarcely any great social evil of our time, about the roots of which the greed of gold has not so intertwined itself that even good men almost despair of uprooting it ; and, as one writer has said, the one conspicuous feature of society as a whole is 'the power of money organized and entrenched against the kingdom of God.' It is Mammon that built the den of the sweater ; it is Mammon that has given its strength to the gambling mania which, like a fever, is raging in our nation's life-blood ; it is Mammon in the form of limited liability companies that is making of our drink traffic a kind of deadly octopus that threatens to strangle us ; it is Mammon that is answerable for the cruel inhumanity, the shameless fraud and trickery, which has so often disgraced our dealings with helpless native races. Can anything, too, be more calculated to make good men uneasy than the ugly facts which every now and then come to light revealing the growing possibility of the corruption of the Press through the power of the purse ? God have mercy upon us if our newspapers pass into the hands of cunning and wealthy schemers, who care nothing for justice and truth, and seek only the service of their own selfish ends.

And let no one think that the Church of Christ is free from peril. John Wesley used to prophesy that, if ever Methodism were destroyed, it would be

destroyed by Mammonism. His last words to the Methodist Societies—spoken when, after sixty or seventy years of service, he was sinking into the dust—consisted of the most solemn and impressive warnings on this subject; and assuredly this is not the day in which to forget them. A distinguished evangelist, who is at the same time an enthusiastic abstainer, has recorded it as his deliberate conviction that if, in the Methodist Church, drunkenness has slain its thousands, Mammonism has slain its tens of thousands.

Of the effects of the evil of covetousness on the individual I can speak now only one word. The heart of the covetous shrivels and withers within him. It was with profound truth that Tennyson wrote of 'the *narrowing* lust of gold.' Every one has read of Silas Marner, in George Eliot's lovely story, withdrawing himself from his kind, shutting himself up with his guineas, caring and living only for them, until his life became 'like a rivulet that has sunk far down from the grassy fringe of its old breadth into a little shivering thread that cuts a groove for itself in the barren sand.' That is the penalty of the gold-heaper: he gets his wealth—at the cost of himself. Did you ever ponder that deep saying of the Psalmist: 'He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul'? Earth has not any sight so pitiful as that—the shrinking and shrivelling of a soul amid the piled-up splendours of material wealth. See you do not

pay that price for your getting. 'Wealth is the devil's conjurer'; therefore take heed

'Lest gaining gain on thee, and make thee dim
To all things else.'

Again I say, it is no question of amount; once let the passion to get and to have become supreme, and, like a devouring fire, it will desolate all the fairest provinces of the soul, leaving them only a charred and blackened waste.

III

How is the covetous spirit to be conquered and cast out? For conquered and cast out it can be. Said the Apostle Paul, 'I had not known sin, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet'; yet the troubled sea ceased its unquiet tossings, and the man who wrote that lived to write this also: 'I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound: in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me.' Paul had learned the song that the pilgrims heard the shepherd-boy sing in the Valley of Humiliation—

'He that is down, needs fear no fall,
He that is low, no pride;
He that is humble, ever shall
Have God to be his guide.

h.

I am content with what I have,
Little be it, or much ;
And, Lord, contentment still I crave,
Because Thou savest such.
Fulness to such a burden is
That go on pilgrimage ;
Here little, and hereafter bliss,
Is best from age to age.'

"Do you hear him?" said Mr. Greatheart ;
"I will dare say that this boy lives a merrier
life, and wears more of that herb called hearts-
ease in his bosom, than he that is clad in silk and
velvet."'

The spirit of covetousness, I say, can be cast out ;
but how? '*Take heed* and beware of covetousness'—
that is the first thing. The evil seed springeth and
groweth we know not how. What a revelation there
is in the statement of St. Francis of Sales that, in all
his experience as a confessor, no one had ever
confessed to him the sin of covetousness! And what
need have we all to pray, with the Psalmist, 'Cleanse
thou me from secret faults'—from the faults that are
hidden not only from the eyes of others, but even
from my own eyes! And again, because covetous-
ness is idolatry, we must learn to give to God the
first place in our life. And because covetousness is
selfishness, we must learn that love which is utter
selflessness, 'the rules for fulfilling all rules, the new
commandment for keeping all the old command-
ments.' And, above all, because covetousness is not
a matter of the lips or of the hands, but of the heart,

therefore must we open our hearts to receive Christ, that every thought may be brought into captivity to the obedience of Him.

Ah, brethren, I may keep my hands from theft and my lips from evil-speaking, but these things that are within, the thoughts of the heart—who is sufficient for these things? ‘I can call spirits from the vasty deep,’ boasted Owen Glendower. ‘Why, so can I,’ was the mocking answer, ‘and so can any man; but will they come when you do call for them?’ And where is he who has power to cast out the devil of covetousness, and bid him enter no more into a man? I tell you, there is no answer save in Him whose voice Paul heard and answered; and this Man commandeth even the unclean spirits of selfishness and greed, and they do obey Him.